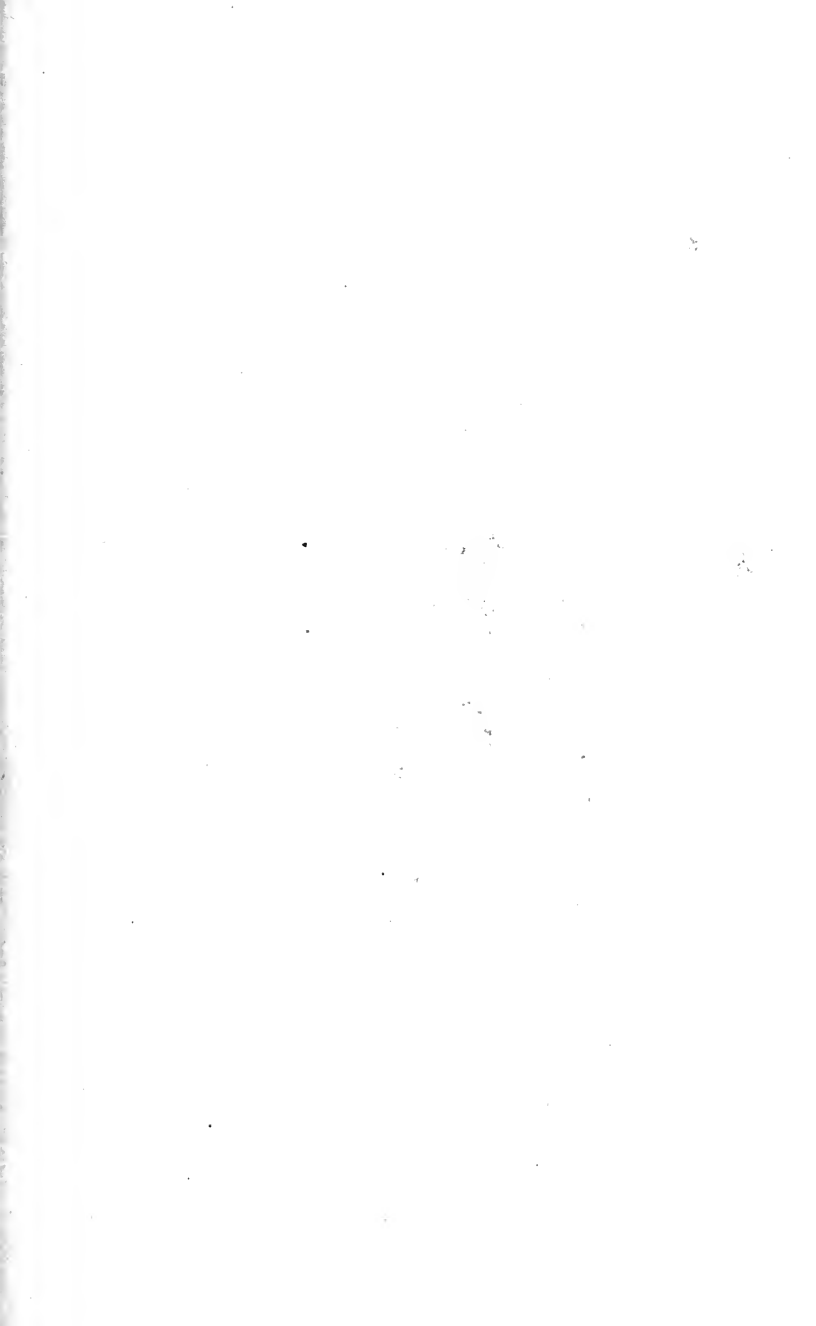
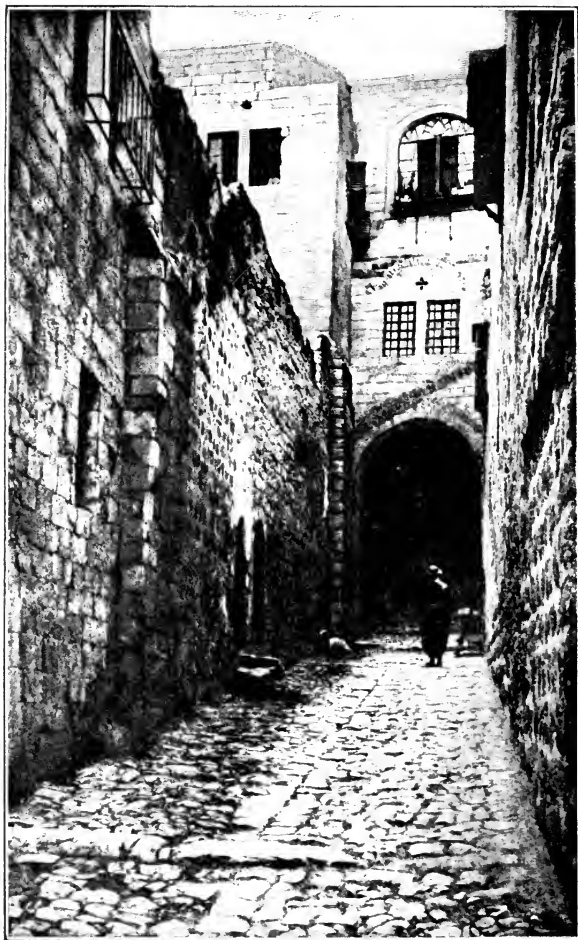


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THE NEW GOD





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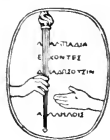
A Tale of the Early Christians

BY

RICHARD VOSS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

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CHAPTER I

VELOSIANUS, who, from his magnificence and his distinction, was called by the people "the king of priests," was one day seized with an intense disgust with everything.

This occurred in the marble "cella" of the temple, before the image of the supreme deity, and in the presence of a blindly believing, worshipping multitude.

While Velosianus, with uplifted arms and eyes, was presenting the sacred offering, he was suddenly overpowered by an irresistible conviction of the utter insignificance of all things earthly and heavenly, as by a band of assassins, against whom a single man is unable to defend himself.

In the midst of the solemn act he dropped his arms, turned from the altar, and, with a

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sudden movement, rent his white, flowing garment from his breast to his feet. Then he strode silently through the ranks of the horror-stricken priests, the dismayed ministrants of the temple, and the stupefied multitude, and passed out of the house of worship.

He walked with his head lifted high, not like one who has been vanquished, but rather like a triumpher, who has won a victory over the greatest of all evils—life itself.

In the tatters of his priestly robe Velosianus strode through the halls of the resplendent sanctuary, and past the multitude of luminous images of the gods, without deigning to cast a glance at them.

In the bluish twilight of the sacred grove of evergreen oaks many beggars had established themselves, as well as the sick and the crippled, stretched on snowy linen, awaiting divine charity dispensed by human hands. At the sight of the imposing figure and commanding mien of the king of priests, they broke out into loud acclamations, as if it were indeed one of the mighty of the earth who was passing through their midst.

Velosianus thought: "Why do they howl?" For in the few moments which had passed

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since his enlightenment, he had forgotten his individuality so completely that he was forced to recall himself to his own mind, before he could realize that it was Velosianus for whom these shouts of joy were intended.

He felt, however, that he *had been* Velosianus!

When he reached the street, the men who were guarding the entrance to the precincts of the temple were about to call for the litter of the great priest. It, as well as chariots and horses and numberless slaves, stood in readiness day and night, and was lined with Phœnician woollen cloth of royal purple, such as in reality was allowed to be used only for the litter of the Cæsar.

But Velosianus warded off the officious gate-keepers, as well as the whole host of those who crowded around him with adulation and homage, as one lost in thought would drive away troublesome gnats. And when the robe of a senator of his acquaintance brushed his own, he lifted the latter as if it had been defiled: from henceforth he would suffer nothing to come in contact with him which, because of its being human and earthly, was common in his eyes.

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Wrapped in his proud, contemptuous silence, as in a mantle of royal purple, with the radiance of victory on his strong face, this man, released from long bondage, strode onward through the dust of the burning highway, nor felt on his uncovered head the scorching rays of the divine luminary.

He had the appearance of one who is gazing into the essence of things as into an abyss. Whoever looked him in the eye evaded him, so that he was able to pursue his way to liberty, as it were, in utter solitude.

A band of lovely youths and maidens came towards him from the opposite direction. These beauteous creatures wore light, festive garments, and crowns of gay flowers upon their heads. But their faces were like those of the dying, and the crowd who accompanied these pallid, bedecked unfortunates preceded and followed them in mournful silence. At times a heavy sigh, a repressed sob, would break the oppressive stillness.

Officials of the Cæsar and several of his magnificent Prætorian Guards were conducting the youths and maidens down to the sea. By the shore there lay a barge, decked with many gay flags and streamers, which was to

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convey the load of tender, fresh human flesh to the Emperor, to his "Isle of the Blest," called by the people the "Isle of the Damned."

It was a sacrificial procession.

Velosianus looked upon these youth of the land, who were being led to death, with as much indifference as if they had been handsome, decorated beasts on the way to the temple which he had left forever. He thought—and he thought it without a trace of horror:

"Truly, Tiberius shows in his madness more reason and logic than a dozen philosophers taken together! Day by day he proves to this rotten, crumbling world that there are no gods in it, nor ever were. He scourges with his Cæsarian madness the servile souls of the brood. And lo! the beasts submit quietly to the rod of the tyrant."

The renegade priest of the Olympians was preceded by the rumor that he had blasphemed the gods and defiled the temple. Others said that the Emperor, in whose favor Velosianus stood very high, had sent to him the announcement of his displeasure, and that this sudden fall from the clouds had unbalanced his mind. That one only needed to look at him to know that—as, with tattered

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garments, with distorted features and staring eyes, he strode along the highway in the glaring sun, unmindful of the Emperor's wrath and the vengeance of the gods.

Thus it happened that, wherever Velosianus went, every one kept aloof from him. His old friends disowned him, those who had until now sung his praises, admired him, and flattered him, had suddenly become his enemies. Those who had formerly been the debtors of the mighty priest spat out before him; and all who had benefited by the generosity of this noble man, and enjoyed his favors, would fain have scourged and stoned him now that he had fallen from his high estate.

If Velosianus, at this hour, had been dying of thirst, no hand would have been stretched out to moisten his parched lips. Possibly one of his mortal enemies might have been willing to offer him such refreshment in order to pour into the cup of saving water the poison of humiliation.

All this did not escape the wanderer's notice. But his disgust at and contempt for everything existing had already reached an immeasurable height. Hence, the sting of a blue-bottle fly would have given him more

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pain than that occasioned him by the sword-stroke of human meanness.

If even the "great, good, and just" gods ever sided with the smiling, the victorious, the happy, and turned away from those who knew nought but tears and sorrow, who could blame petty, malicious, and unjust mortals for striking a man in the face on whose brow was set the seal of misfortune!

It seemed to Velosianus as if, with all the splendor of his priesthood, and as long as he was highly honored and flattered by men, he had been immersed, body and soul, in a morass; he was conscious of his whole body, his whole soul being befouled. He felt that he should die of shame if he did not succeed in purifying himself in the ether of solitude and the pride of abandonment. He recognized that he would not be wholly liberated and redeemed, until he had once more become a son of Mother Earth.

Lost in such reflections, Velosianus left the dust of the broad highway and the loathsome human exhalations of the plain, girding his robe with the amethyst-colored priestly head-band, which, until now, had still encircled his brow. At first he ascended by means of

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smooth garden-paths, then followed a track which led him through a fragrant, dusky laurel-grove, to a wide field full of myrtle and oleander bushes in bloom.

Not only the whole wave-washed, hilly coast, however, but all the country around, with its heights and depths, was thickly strewn with the proud magnificence of golden Rome, and the stately temples of the gods in whom the king of priests no longer believed. The shore, lined as far as eye could reach with a shining strip of luxurious country-seats, stretched along the glistening waters, which, on this beauteous strand, washed, instead of cliffs and sand, white marble and blood-red porphyry.

Like a sparkling and flaming carnelian there stood out against the sunset-glow the magic rock of the aged Emperor, who was the victim of his rule of the world, and of the pitifulness of all things created. The waves which dashed against its base wore a wondrous violet hue, while as they receded, and mingled with the rippling waters farther off, they assumed a pearly sheen.

As long as Velosianus, revolting inwardly, had, even to his prime, served the gods, he had never observed that even a blade of grass or

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an insignificant weed is a marvel of loveliness. Suddenly, through his own might, his eyes had been opened. And for the first time in his life the king of priests recognized with amazement the beauty of heaven and earth.

He reached a field, overgrown with a silvery-leaved, powerfully scented weed, which reached to his hips as he walked through it. In front of him there rose up a steep, bare peak, apparently covered with a web of deep blue. Amid the flood of fragrance which surrounded him, the wanderer approached this beauteous island. By degrees he recognized that the rock was enveloped in blue lilies, growing blossom by blossom.

He ascended it.

In a short time he stood upon the summit. Now he was entirely alone.

The sky was lit by a violet sunset-glow, which sank down upon the peak, descended lower and lower, spreading over the earth and the sea, that received the sinking sun and greedily absorbed its lustre—absorbed all the light and life of the world.

Like a lonely, luminous column, Velosianus stood upon the indigo-colored flower-carpet of the rocky peak, watching the radiant death of

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the day. Of a sudden, even on this, the first evening of his self-deliverance and his victory, an unspeakable sadness came over him. He had triumphantly buried the old dead gods. Yet, still standing unmoved by their graves, he recognized even at this hour that man had need of gods more than of his daily bread—at least, he needed to believe in gods.

Thus thinking, the former priest was appalled at the weakness of human nature, which cannot exist without a heavenly delusion. But while from the depths there crept up a pallid twilight, which was succeeded by a starry, solemn night, this godless man was seized with an irresistible longing to go into all the world, to wander through all creation, in order to seek a God—a living God!

CHAPTER II

VELOSIANUS, after having become more and more convinced that the yearning for a divine spirit is undying in man, overcame the horror with which the weakness of his earthly nature inspired him. But he did not descend from the height which he had reached, but led, in a hidden grotto among the rocks, the introspective, purifying existence of a hermit.

For before he could go out to become a homeless wanderer on the face of the earth, he must needs prepare himself in the pure life of the wilderness, so that the new God, for whom no temples had as yet been erected, could find a dwelling-place in his soul.

The consecration to which he purposed to subject himself he accomplished by endeavoring not to think of anything abstruse and perplexing, to feel nothing but nature about him: the day with its warmth and its brightness, the night with its blue darkness and its

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starry carpet spread over the peacefully breathing, reposing earth; the waving of the grass in the wind; the hum of insects among the herbs; the fragrance and the hue of a blossom; the song of the birds, which resounded from the wooded depths; the beauty of a leaf, of a tiny seed, of a dew-drop.

There was in the world such a wealth, such an exuberance of divine objects, that Velosianus, who had denied and blasphemed the gods, now seemed to recognize even in a grain of sand a creative and preserving power.

He drank the water of the cool mountain-spring which burst forth beside his cave; he ate the food of the shepherds who tended their flocks on the wide Alpine pasture, and to whom the lonely, noble stranger at first appeared like a god. He had doffed his tattered priestly robe, as well as his desecrated head-band, and hung them on a withered thorn-bush, where they were a terror to the birds and a toy of the winds, until the officials of the Emperor, who were seeking him on the mountain, found the robe and head-band, took them home, and reported: "This is all that is left of the king of priests!"

For the shepherds did not betray Velosi-

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anus, nor did they believe that he was a blasphemer and an evil-doer.

He wore a garment like those of the sons of the mountains, made of black, long-haired goat-skin and the fleeces of white lambs, and his head remained uncovered, so that the sun could shine upon it freely and the winds play around it.

When he had contemplated the beauty of heaven and earth until he was weary unto death, he would stretch himself at full length among the herbs and suffer himself to fall asleep, soothed by their fragrance. Then, when awakened by the scream of a falcon wheeling in the air above him, the loud flapping of the wings of a sea-eagle which passed near him, or a clap of thunder overhead, he felt in himself a strange power, as if he were not Velosianus, but Antæus, who received new strength from contact with the earth.

Thus passed the radiant, burning summer, the bacchic autumn, and the gray time of the winter rains. Then March transformed the evergreen heights into fields of blue violets and golden crocuses, which were followed by blood-red anemones, and these again by the white, sweet-smelling narcissus.

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In this beautiful time of rejuvenescence of the earth, Velosianus had an adventure.

He ascended the mountain until he reached the border of the dark primeval carob and ilex groves, which were inhabited by demons. Here, in many of the hollow trunks, bees had built their pale waxen cells, and it was Velosianus' purpose to investigate whether they had already filled any of the latter with the clear golden juice of flowers. For the supply of honey laid in by his friends the shepherds had become exhausted unusually early.

The former priest, who no longer believed in the gods, was yet still in doubt whether the trees were not, after all, inhabited by dryads, the springs by naiads; whether groves and heights, fields and plains, winds and waves, did not still own their spirits, lovely or appalling, beneficent or malevolent. During the summer, at noontide, when, with glare and burning heat, a heavy sultriness would sink from the heavens upon the earth, so that not a blade of grass could stir, and, in the oppressive silence, even the insects seemed to suspend their humming, Velosianus, too, with drowsy soul, had at times softly said to himself, "Great Pan is sleeping!" and, half in a

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dream, had smiled at his childish belief in the deities and fabulous beings with which Hellas peoples nature.

But now, as the awe of the primeval forest came over him, when there was silence around him as in a catacomb, in which the dying and dead patriarchs of the woods appeared like gigantic black corpses set on end; and when he suddenly heard a long-drawn wail—then even Velosianus looked about, and asked himself whether the terrible genius of this awful place were not speaking to him? He discovered an apparently human being, which leaned, standing upright, against a weather-beaten cypress-tree, as stiffly and rigidly as if it were a part of the wood, the soul of the gloomy tree, which had been thrust out.

This creature of the woods wore a long, foreign-looking, mantle-like garment, which was drawn over its head, and was of a brilliant blue. This veil of deep azure encircled a pale and perfectly white female face of great beauty, but so utterly devoid of life that the woman under the tree of death resembled a phantom-like corpse.

She was looking at Velosianus with wide-open clear eyes, staring as if in paralyzing

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horror. These eyes wore an expression as if they had seen in a dream the beginning and end of all things, the dying hour of the world and of humanity.

The moaning sigh did not leave her lips, which were white and firmly closed. It seemed as if the whole form rang with the lamentation, like the sounding image of the desert.

Towards this unearthly creature Velosianus strode slowly, fixing his ardent human gaze upon its ghostly, death-like eye.

When he stood close to the phantom, he recognized that the woman was a very young maiden, almost a child.

Then he was terrified!

After a while he spoke to the creature, entreatingly:

"Whence comest thou? Whither goest thou? What art thou?"

But the form gave no answer, however much he might question and inquire. Only her wailing grew lower and sounded more human. And there came into her fixed gaze a light which moved Velosianus to a wondrous pity, although he had a bitter hatred of such a feeling, for it humiliated him who experienced it, as well as the one towards whom it

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was directed. But however he might struggle against it, he was still forced to yield himself up to this sensation. For he recognized, likewise, that this was no dryad or other imaginary being, but that it was human flesh and blood.

She might have lost her way—she must be out of her mind. To judge by her un-Roman garments she seemed to have come from foreign lands—from beyond the sea, where the great deserts and wildernesses were. The Jewish women in Galilee wore such ample and stately robes.

Velosianus therefore addressed the stranger once more in the Hebrew language:

“Whither goest thou? Who art thou? What wouldst thou?”

But even now she did not answer him.

Her sighs, however, became very low, and the light in her fixed eye more and more human.

Velosianus would have taken hold of her, but at his touch she gave a cry, so that he immediately drew back.

He stepped quite far away from her. At once the blue figure detached itself from the black trunk of the cypress. It moved, stepped forward, and followed him: slowly, silently,

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as if with bound feet, and without any movement of the head and arms.

Velosianus left the gloom of the primeval forest, and went out into the brightness of the day. He thought: "Now the delusion will vanish."

But she still followed him—as if forcibly drawn after him by the breath of earth which hovered around his stately figure.

Velosianus went on farther. And she followed him farther and farther still.

She had grown silent.

CHAPTER III

IN the cave among the rocks, on a bed of dried mountain-herbs, lay the young Hebrew maiden, sick unto death, and cared for by Velosianus. His shepherd friends, who came to inquire about the stranger, and who knew more of the art of Esculapius than many a great physician, said: "This sick maiden must die!"

Velosianus, whose strong soul felt sick with the power of his wondrous pity, thought:

"Then she will be soon released!"

And he awaited her death impatiently.

Sitting day and night by the fragrant bed of herbs on which lay she whom he thought dying, he noticed something incomprehensible and awful: Death came to the strange child-woman, and would have clasped her in its peace-bestowing arms and kissed the faintly moaning lips until they were silent as the grave. But as often as Death approached

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the Hebrew maiden, bending over her, it was thrust away again by a still mightier power.

Death and Life struggled with each other, with a force which Velosianus, who had heard the last sigh of many who had been released, had never witnessed before. Often he thought: "Now it is over!" But she opened her lips and eyes again and again.

She could not die!

She lived, and the sickness left her!

Remembering how she had cried out at his touch, he broke off a young, slender laurel-tree, by means of which the convalescent arose from her bed and left the cave with tottering steps. In the mild March sun, amid a profusion of spring flowers, Velosianus bade her lie down. He rolled to the spot a piece of rock covered with thick moss, against the luxurious cushion of which she leaned her weak head, and then brought her, in a vessel of graceful form—a gift from the shepherds—wholesome goat's-milk, which he sweetened with the first clear honey of the year.

She accepted all his deeds of love as if she did not notice them. At times she would talk to herself. With a voice which seemed to come from another world, this child spoke

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dark, demoniacal words, as if she were a seer or a sibyl, like those who dwell in unfathomable forests, on lofty peaks, or in mysterious grottos by the sea.

She spoke of a wondrous man, whose form and spirit gave out warmth like sunshine, and whom she called her Lord and Saviour. The eyes of this man beamed with pity for human sorrow, and the sufferings of mankind had driven the smile from his face. He walked upon the waters and could make himself unseen. There went out from him a power that made the blind see and the lame walk. With the might of his word or look, with the laying on of his hands, he healed the sick, he loosed the prisoners, he fed the hungry, he raised the dead—

But as the stranger proclaimed this last greatest miracle of this radiant being, she was seized with such terror that Velosianus, on witnessing it, began to tremble with pity. After that she spoke no more for a long time.

From the words which she dropped later Velosianus learned, or rather divined, that the child had left her father and mother, impelled by a divine spirit. She had crossed the sea on a Roman vessel. A furious storm burst over

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and nearly wrecked the ship. At this the mariners took the maiden with the snow-white face and threw her into the sea; for they looked upon her as a living corpse, or a witch, or some other noxious, spectral being.

But behold, the child was not drowned! The wild waves took her and bore her, as on a mother's arms, to a shore, on which they laid her.

Thus rescued, she arose and wandered on, as if nought had happened to her. She went on her way without stopping and without resting, without questioning and without fear.

But, wherever she appeared, they cried to her: "Misfortune, avaunt!" And they picked up stones and threw them at her. The stones struck her, but neither killed nor even wounded her.

Then she fled from all mankind into the forests and wildernesses. For many days she wandered and strayed about, without craving food or drink. Hunger and exhaustion harmed her as little as waves and the casting of stones.

During all these wanderings she spoke in her soul but the one word: "Lord! Lord! Lord!"

This one word upon her lips had brought

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about that the raging waters did not overwhelm her, that the stones cast at her did not cause her death, that she did not succumb to hunger and exhaustion, that she could wander and wander on unceasingly.

Once she had remembered her father in Galilee, who loved his daughter devotedly; for she was the only child of her parents. And as she thought of having left this loving father, she forgot, in her soul, that one single word.

Suddenly all strength went from her, as if a strong stick and staff had broken like a straw. Bereft of all power, she sank, in the mountain-wilderness, against the trunk of a tree of death, where she was found by Velosianus.

Now she again cried incessantly in her soul: "Lord! Lord! Lord!"

Now, too, she had the strength once more to wander on.

Whither?

To the Cæsar!

What would she have of Tiberius? For that earthly god did not show mercy; he only condemned.

Therefore — what would she have of the Cæsar?

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That the "Lord" would make manifest to her as soon as she stood before the Cæsar.

Velosianus felt convinced that it would be easier to command the lightning not to destroy, than to hinder this child in its wanderings.

"Go, then. And I will go with thee!"

He purposed to take the strange maiden to Cæsar; although he was aware that Tiberius was very wroth with the faithless priest, and intended to summon him before his own tribunal, and himself pronounce his sentence, which would probably be death.

CHAPTER IV

VELOSIANUS sent a shepherd to the nearest town, which was Surentum, to buy for him a long, dark garment, in which he could appear with dignity before the Cæsar, even though it were as an unbeliever and a malefactor. The money for this purchase he obtained from the proceeds of a ring set with a large beryl, which he had worn on his finger when he left the gods, the temple, and mankind. The shrewd messenger executed this commission advantageously. From the sale of the costly ring he brought back to the mountain not only the required garment, but also a bagful of coin.

Upon this Velosianus and the young Hebrew maiden made ready for their departure.

But the shepherds were loath to have the former king of priests leave them. They surrounded him, and urged :

“Lord, stay with us ! Since thou hast dwelt on the mountain our flocks have prospered.

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We have wellnigh more milk than we need, and a greater number of lambs and kids than ever before. And not one of our beasts, in that time, has been killed by a rolling stone or fallen into a treacherous abyss. They say that thou hast denied the gods ; but we believe that the gods have sent thee to us. Lord, stay with us !”

Velosianus recognized in the love of this wild and solitary people that common feature which of all things human he hated the most, although it is the mighty power which solely and alone upholds the world and all mankind—selfishness. Nevertheless—strange contradiction in a human heart!—nevertheless, this selfish love of the rugged tribe was gratifying to the harsh and yet at the same time deeply yearning spirit of him who was about to bid farewell to the peace of solitude.

But he answered the suppliants :

“I must leave the mountain and conduct this poor lost child to the Emperor. I feel impelled to do so in my inmost soul.”

The shepherds cried :

“Tiberius will have thee captured and killed !”

Velosianus replied, with a faint smile :

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“The gods will guard me even from the Emperor Tiberius ; for I must go out into the world, to seek through the whole world the new, living God.”

They understood him not, murmured against him, mourned for him, and would fain have torn the ghostly being from his side and cast her into an abyss, so that he might remain upon their mountain.

Muttering and sorrowing, the whole tribe accompanied Velosianus as far as the black border of the forest, which, like a magic circle, divided the gleaming pastures of the loftiest heights and the gardens of balmy herbs from the valleys thronged with human beings.

The youths among the shepherds sent after their departing friend ringing shouts and cries of farewell, so that it seemed as if the rocks and the woods had received a voice and the air were filled with roaring sounds. Then Velosianus recognized that his old power over the hearts of men had not left him when he turned away from the great and eternal gods.

So he, with his companion, descended from the sacred heights to the dull, misty depths. But the lofty repose and the solemn silence of solitude, which he had imbibed with thirsty

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soul on the peak high above the sea, remained within him and never left him again.

*

Not from fear of the blind hatred of the senseless throng by which Velosianus knew himself to be persecuted, but to spare the stranger the gaping curiosity of the populace, and the outbursts of its ignorance and superstition, he led her down the mountain by secret paths.

When the wanderers reached the region where the solemn wilderness was changed to fertile, smiling fields, and the sacred silence of solitude had to give way to the noise and din of inhabited districts, the former priest persuaded his companion to take a rest under a rocky wall, overgrown with roses, which seemed like a boundary-stone between the regions of earth and heaven. In this lovely spot the two resolved to await the beginning of twilight, in order to reach, under the protection of the dying day, the first human dwellings.

The young Hebrew maiden did not wander of her own free will, but under the compulsion of a strange power. A voice within commanded, and she obeyed, as the echo obeys the call. With wide-open eyes she moved and

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walked, heard and stood still. But her soul was in a dream, and borne far away beyond land and sea.

It was the season when the Hebrews celebrated the passover : the first day, on which they baked the unleavened bread, and ate the Paschal lamb together, two days before the holy Sabbath of the Jews.

The stranger had laid herself down in the tender grass beneath the rocky wall, and crossed her hands on her bosom. In the dream which her rapt soul was dreaming, she saw distant objects and spoke wondrous words.

Velosianus stood beside her, leaning against the brown stone, looked out upon the night that was slowly falling, listened to the song of the birds, with which the air was resounding, and to the ecstatic words of the Hebrew maiden.

She was speaking to him whom she called "Lord," and whom, in her visions, she saw face to face.

"O thou who didst lay thy hand upon the dead maiden and recall her to life, I could not anoint thy feet with costly spikenard, nor wipe them with my hair, as did that woman, on whom thou wroughtest no miracle!"

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Velosianus turned pale as death: This maiden had been among the dead, had risen again from death! And yonder radiant man, whom she called "Lord," had, by the mere laying on of his hands, brought back her who was dead from the realm of shadow to the brilliant day!

Who was this "Lord?"

He could be no other than a god! For none but a god could perform so supreme a miracle.

And he must be a living god!

For none but a living god could restore the dead to life.

Velosianus gazed fixedly at the reclining maiden.

This, then, was the cause of the snow-white face, of the wide-open, startled eyes! Of the gaze which had rested on the superhuman: the realm of the dead! And of all else that was mysterious and awe-inspiring in this marvellous being! For whoever has returned from the dead cannot possibly breathe among the living any longer. This unknown, mighty, living God, who could raise the dead, had merely awakened the maiden's dead body to a ghostly, unreal life—her soul had remained with the dead.

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Velosianus would fain have felt his former painful pity, but it had changed to dread. Almost anxiously he sought for his lost compassion, which, after all, had shamed and humiliated him. But he could not recover it.

Once he even thought of flying from her who had been raised from the dead, and stealing away in the dusk. But then he called himself a coward, and remained.

And he continued his watch beside her as she took her rest by the rocky wall overgrown with roses, the fragrance of which grew more and more overpowering as the day faded, so that the senses of the watcher seemed enveloped in ambrosial mists.

CHAPTER V

“AND when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them: ‘With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ And he took the cup—”

Here the maiden began to speak so low that Velosianus could no longer understand her. She still had her eyes wide open and lifted towards the heavens, where the flames of the sunset were spreading, as if the world were about to be swallowed up in fire and blood.

There was silence roundabout; Nature seemed to be holding her breath. Not one of the birds, who, in throngs, had just now been singing loud jubilees, was to be heard now. It seemed as if, with the setting sun, all the life of the world were fading away.

Of a sudden the Hebrew maiden arose,

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looked out into the distant glow, and said, in a loud voice :

“Now I will go with my Lord to the Mount of Olives ! His disciples, who accompany him, will sleep, while he wakes, suffers, and sighs. But I will wake and suffer and sigh with him.”

She walked on before Velosianus into the darkness.

But it so happened that they actually came to an olive-grove. The old gnarled trunks stood motionless, stretching their thousands of light, tender branches out into the dusky air. Suddenly, as the two were passing on, all the leaves of the grove began to shiver and to tremble. A sound as of sobbing and of sighing was heard, as if the divine body of Nature were being scourged with rods, and there fell from the moaning branches upon the blossoms of the sward a dew which resembled trickling drops of blood.

Just then a cry resounded, as if the soul of humanity had received a dagger-thrust. This was followed by deep silence, as if the soul of humanity had died of the mortal wound.

And Velosianus heard the Hebrew maiden call out in agony :

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“Now Judas Iscariot has betrayed his Lord and Saviour with a kiss!”

*

In the course of the night they reached the sea-shore, where Velosianus, in the midst of the splendid structures of the Roman country-seats, had difficulty in discovering, among the cliffs almost hidden by marble, a lonely spot.

Not a star was shining, and the sky was covered with heavy clouds, which the wind drove hither and thither, tore to shreds, piled up again, and mingled in wildest confusion. At the same time a roaring sound came down from above, as if a raging sea were boiling and seething in the air.

On the earth the oppressive silence continued. Not a leaf stirred, not a gnat hummed, and the great wilderness of the waters lay quiescent at the feet of the two wanderers.

Velosianus found the hut of a fisherman. The door was bolted. Inside, anxious voices were calling upon the great gods for protection.

Velosianus was obliged to knock and call for a long time before the door was opened to him. The inmates of the house, pale with

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fright, did not ask whence he came and what he would have, but whether he knew the meaning of the signs and wonders of this night? Whether the gods were once more battling with the Titans, or whether the fire-mountain was about to break out again?

Velosianus said to the fisherman :

“Make ready thy boat! Thou art to take me and this woman over to the Cæsar without delay.”

That name made a greater impression than even the roaring voices in the air. The trembling at the appalling phenomena of nature was subdued by the dread of the demoniacal human spirit which ruled the earth. Nature could feel pity, but not Cæsar.

But when the fisherman reached the shore and saw the motionless sea : his sea, that, since the creation of the world, had dashed restlessly against these cliffs, he cried aloud with terror. For with the motionless waves of the sea all things stood still for him that were under the sky. He threw himself upon the sand, lay like one dead, and would listen to nothing.

Upon this Velosianus took the boat, and himself rowed the Hebrew maiden across the sea to the Cæsar ; over unmoved, mirror-like wa-

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ters, beneath the scudding clouds and the loud, raging voices of the sky.

The maiden crouched in the boat. Her spirit, which was roaming far away, once more saw visions and wondrous things that were being fulfilled at that hour, and of which the mouth of this child upon the sea bare witness.

“Then the high-priest rent his clothes, saying: ‘He hath spoken blasphemy. What think ye?’

“They answered and said: ‘He is guilty of death.’

“Then they spat in his face and buffeted him, saying:

“‘Prophesy unto us, O thou Christ, who is he that smote thee!’”

Velosianus listened to everything, and treasured up all her words in his soul.

*

It seemed as if this night would never come to an end, and no day was to break over this sea.

Darkness and gloom still reigned as the boat approached the island of the Emperor. Seeking a harbor or a bay, Velosianus steered around the rocky walls, which rose from the waters like the stronghold of a magician.

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Suddenly there shone out of the darkness a fiery pinnacle, from which arose brilliantly illuminated porticos. Above and below this luminous apparition thick darkness prevailed, so that it seemed as if a portion of Elysium were shining through a rift in the clouds.

Velosianus was still gazing, while resting on his oars, upon this magic light, when the sweet sound of flutes and cymbals fell upon his ear. At the same time he saw a throng of radiant figures emerging from the porticos. He heard cries of "Evoe!" and the mad sounds of a bacchanal. Now a burst of loud laughter was heard, and then a scream—piercing, awful!

A death-cry!

From the fiery pinnacle there fell a light, shadowy object. It hovered downward, sank, and struck the motionless waters with a loud report close by the boat. Velosianus bent over, put out his hand, and grasped a soft female breast.

On the pinnacle of his rocky island the Cæsar was celebrating one of his nocturnal love-feasts, while in the palace of Caiaphas, the high-priest, they were spitting in the face of the Son of Man.

*

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Velosianus drew the young body from the water, and thought: "If the 'Lord' of the Hebrew maiden were on Tiberius's Isle of the Blest, he would find enough to do with laying on of hands and raising the dead."

And he thought further: "If this 'Lord' is a living God who has power over the dead, so that the graves open, what need is there of his laying on of hands and of his command? His will alone should suffice. With his mere will he should banish death from the world—banish from the world all sorrow and all guilt. The Lord's will alone should transform this world of guilt and of misery into an abode of the blest."

And Velosianus began to doubt more and more whether the wondrous God of the daughter of Jairus, who had risen from the dead, was in truth a god—the new God, who in place of the old dead and buried gods could rule the world, greater and more just than they.

*

Velosianus guided the boat farther along the cliffs, and came to that side of the island which lay opposite the voluptuous city of Parthenope and the fire-mountain, guarded by demons. A

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pale dawn was beginning to show itself. From the black summit of Vesuvius streams of burning lava were running, like fiery, hissing serpents from the head of the Gorgon. In the gray light of the breaking day the rocky island, with its temples and villas, its pleasure-groves and nymphæa, its fields of roses and its statues, resembled the midsummer night's dream of a god who once was great and highly blest, but had since lost his reason.

A cock crowed on Caprea.

“Now Peter has denied his Lord and Saviour even for the third time!” said the Hebrew maiden.

CHAPTER VI

VELOSIANUS left the stranger with the body of the young victim of the Cæsar in the boat, which he had guided into a small bay bordered by blooming almond-trees. He found the shore surrounded by a living wall through which no earth-born creature could reach Tiberius.

It was the body-guard of the Cæsar, which was designed to protect the imperial misanthrope from everything human.

Velosianus was taken before a young captain. To this noble-looking youth he said:

“I am Velosianus, he whom they called the king of priests, and who is accused of having denied and blasphemed the gods. Prithee, have me conducted to the Cæsar’s presence, so that Tiberius may pronounce my sentence.”

The young warrior was pleased with the royal manner of him who made this self-accusation, and replied:

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“Velosianus, I will myself take thee to the Emperor. But do not hope for a mild sentence. The Cæsar’s spirit is more lonely and gloomy than ever. Nothing on earth is so hateful to him as the sight of a human countenance with a proud mien. Since he has had cause to regard the beloved features of his Sejanus as a mask and a lie, even the sublime countenance of the supreme deity is disfigured and distorted for him.”

Velosianus smiled on the eager youth, and declared, calmly :

“The Cæsar is right in no longer believing in anything. What is there in this world that is not a mask and a lie? Take me, therefore, to my Emperor and judge.”

“O Velosianus, I am leading thee to thy fate!” cried the captain, gazing with warm youthful sympathy on the intellectual and calm features of the apostate priest.

Velosianus looked at the excited youth with some surprise, and said, in a suppressed voice :

“I have seen before to-day that flowers are still blooming on Caprea under the Emperor Tiberius; but that there can still exist on Caprea, under the Emperor Tiberius, a good and pure man, I have learned only now.”

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The youth colored vehemently, turned from Velosianus hastily, called to some of his men, and bade them, in a harsh voice, to inquire in which of his many villas the Cæsar had spent the night. Velosianus could give him the desired information.

“The Imperator has celebrated a feast at the Villa of Jupiter, for from thence the sea was strewn with pale human flowers.”

The captain reprimanded him for his bold speech :

“The Cæsar is lord of life and death ! Thou wilt learn that, king of priests. Follow me, now !”

“The Lord’s will be done !” replied Velosianus, with his faint, shrewd smile, as he followed the young warrior.

As the two left the house of the imperial guard, they found assembled in front of it a number of prætorians and servants of the Emperor’s household. As, on the whole island, no one dared to speak a loud word, for fear of breaking the silence which the supreme ruler of the world had decreed to have around him, these men were whispering together, and showed their agitation by gestures and the expression of their faces.

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It still seemed as if no sun had risen, no day were breaking. The loveliest and most radiant realm of the earth had been transformed into a shadow-world devoid of light.

Above the black vault of clouds the roaring continued, and unlimited darkness rested upon the sea. In the dark distance Vesuvius was shaking his blood-red, waving, fiery hair.

Not a bird was to be heard. The leaves on the trees seemed frozen with horror at this speechless, exanimate nature.

Freeing himself with difficulty from the excited throng, the youth conducted his voluntary prisoner to the summit of the eastern peak, which was crowned by the Villa of Jupiter.

Wherever they went, the bare rock of this imperial pleasure resort resting on the sea was transformed into precious stone. It bore, amid ever-blooming roses, a forest of multi-colored columns, interspersed with which were countless marble images of deities, some in naked Olympian beauty, some clad in golden garments, with jewelled eyes and lustrous hair.

All these celestials seemed to Velosianus to-day to have pale countenances and dim eyes.

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There was an atmosphere as if earth and heaven were all aglow, and the two, as they ascended, breathed scorching dust.

The captain said :

“ This is like the air of the desert : and behold, yonder is the sand of the desert.”

At the same time he pointed to a large, milk-white flower by the way-side, which was thickly covered with a pale reddish tinge. As he passed his hand over it, a delicate trace as of blood remained upon it.

As they reached the top of the ridge, at the spot where, between two rocky peaks, the glistening sea on the other side of the island appears, they saw the Cæsar descending from the Villa of Jupiter, and took up their station by the way-side. The imperial train resembled a purple wave rolling slowly down a bed of marble and gold.

Tiberius sat in an open litter, lined with woollen stuff of imperial purple. The Cæsar's robe was of the same material and color. All the bearers of the mighty ruler, as well as those who escorted the lord of the Roman realm, wore garments of the same glowing hue.

When the Cæsar reached the gentle depres-

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sion where the road runs level for a short distance, Velosianus saw the train of Tiberius outlined against the dark sky as if painted in blood.

He said to the captain :

“When thou hast delivered me over to Cæsar, take charge, I pray thee, of the two women whom thou wilt find in a boat in the bay by the almond-trees. Conduct one of the two to the Cæsar. She has come from the home of the desert sand, to kneel at the feet of the Imperator.”

Tiberius saw Velosianus and the captain waiting by the way-side, recognized the former king of priests, and beckoned to the bearers to stop. From the burden of his purple folds he addressed the apostate with the mien and look of an aged demon weary of the world and despising all created things :

“Well, Velosianus, thou who dost deny the gods, what brings thee to me ?”

“It may be a god, O Cæsar.”

“Whom thou didst create for thyself, when thou didst disown the other gods ?”

“Thou knowest, Cæsar, that we erected temples and built altars to the unknown god !”

“And that god has inspired thee with a longing to see my face, and for thine own

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death. For thou knowest well that I am constrained to find thee guilty of death."

"I know it, and I came."

"And thou dost hope, nevertheless, that thine unknown god will protect thee from the Cæsar's judgment? For even the proudest and freest of you puny, fettered human spirits clings to life as a fly to a honeycomb. We will see if thy new God will prove himself powerful. I should rejoice at it. For behold, among the old gods, the day does not even break in these times."

Tiberius turned from Velosianus his pale, weary countenance, which seemed as lifeless as those of the marble images by the way-side, and lifted it towards the heavens, in the darkness of which there was no change.

The glowing streak of the imperial train glided on over the depression, and then up the rocky walls of the western peak.

Velosianus, with his conductors, followed at some distance.

Again the faint smile played around his grave lips.

For he knew now: the Emperor and he were like two augurs, whose eyes secretly smiled to each other whenever they met.

CHAPTER VII

VELOSIANUS was confined in an apartment of the imperial villa until the Cæsar should order him to be brought before him, which occurred in the afternoon of the same day.

Tiberius had fled from the black skies, the black earth, the black sea, and the burning desert air to one of the baths which Nature itself seemed to have established on the wondrous island, not for an emperor, but for a divinity.

Through a passage hewn in the rock, strewn with white roses and hung with silvery textures, Velosianus was conducted, by two torchbearers and a noble youth, to the presence of the Emperor. His companions wore an air of sadness, as if they had arisen out of Hades: every one about Tiberius forgot how to smile.

The passage led downward, towards the sea.

After traversing a short distance in silence,

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the torch-bearers stopped. Velosianus found himself in front of a wall of gilded bronze, on which two Oceanides were represented in relief. The beautiful, sad youth stepped forward, touched a large jewel which sparkled amid the sculpture; the golden wall parted like a curtain, and Velosianus looked upon a flood of bluish, silvery sheen.

It was like the light of a subterranean sun, which, rising from the abysses of the sea, illuminated the waves, and gave them the appearance of molten sapphires, the reflection of which filled the grotto formed by the rocks above.

The apostate, lost in amazement, stepped forward, looked down into a luminous depth, and saw it stirred by young, nude human forms. Around their graceful limbs the caressing waves clung like a web of sky-blue crystal, in which the bathers resembled supernatural beings of light.

Sparkling and glistening, these nereids of the Emperor dove beneath the waters and rose again, formed a constellation of stars, separated again like rays, floated hither and thither, rocked upon their bed of rippling azure.

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On the brink of this magic basin of water Tiberius was reclining on golden carpets. With weary eyes, with motionless features, he looked upon this wonderful play of the waves, which was wont to be carried on almost in silence at his feet, until the Cæsar felt still more weary, or the ruler of the world was suddenly seized with a languid disgust.

Velosianus was forced to wait quite a long while before it pleased Tiberius to notice him. At a sign from the Imperator he at last descended a narrow flight of steps in the rocks, which led him to the couch of the world-sick hermit of Caprea.

*

“Velosianus, thou art a wise man. Thou knowest that thy life is forfeited to the gods and to my laws; and thou dost fear neither the avenging celestials, nor the imperial judge, nor atoning death. Therefore, Velosianus, tell me, frankly: What dost thou think of our antiquated times, of the human beings of these times, satiated with the every-day dish of life, and the solitary spirit who rules over them, and at the same time despises them?”

With his faint smile Velosianus replied:

“Of our times I think that there is little

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in them that was created by the gods, to whom we erected temples, altars, and statues. I think of the men of this day that they are so unworthy of great and mighty gods that they are only worthy of kneeling before idols. Of thee, O Cæsar! I think that there is no greater proof of universal human weakness than that even the Emperor Tiberius is not capable of being so great at the end of his reign as he was at its beginning.”

This insanely bold speech was followed by a long silence between the two men. Nothing was to be heard but the soft, voluptuous plashing of the restless, silvery-blue waves against the shore, strewn with golden sand, of the rocky grotto.

With his unfathomable gaze fixed upon Velosianus, his death-like features covered with a pallor that was like the breath of corruption, Tiberius said :

“ O Velosianus, thou hast pronounced thine own sentence! Not only hast thou denied the gods — which the Emperor might have forgiven thee — but thou hast also maligned the Cæsar — which the Emperor cannot pardon. Hence I condemn thee to the thousand-fold death-penalty of continuing to live! And

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moreover, thou shalt undergo thy punishment in my presence, which will alone be a sufficient atonement for grave crime. Since thou hast seen with thine own eyes *what* I have become, I may, some day, allow thee to hear with thine own ears *how* I have become so."

Velosianus, who had lost his smile, replied sadly, and in a low voice :

"I know it, O Cæsar ! It was not the gods, who do not exist, that created thee thus ; nor was it thine unlimited rule and the consciousness of thy supreme power ; but that thou hast become what thou art, and that thou art now lying there like one sick unto death, of whose life the physicians give no hope, that is the fault of man."

At this Tiberius suddenly started up from his golden bed. Like a spirit of hate and of revenge the gaunt figure stood upon the shining brink of the azure grotto, above the flood of youth and beauty. The Emperor stretched forth his fleshless arms from his purple robe, and cried in a piercing voice, which the rocky walls, like a troop of howling demons, flung at each other :

"It is man who has made me what I am—

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man! And, therefore, there must be gods, to avenge me on man! It is my will that there should be gods! And if there are none, they must be created—I will create them! I will create new, mighty gods, a new, gigantic god-fable, before which this rotten humanity will crumble into dust!"

Thus cried Tiberius. In his eyes glowed the madness of the Cæsars.

At that moment something unheard-of, incomprehensible, occurred.

It seemed as if the vault of an iron sky were being dashed down upon the grotto. The heavy, black pall which, since the beginning of the night before, had been suspended over the earth, burst amid the howling of a storm. A blood-red sun shot forth its mighty sheaves of rays, and ignited the raging, roaring sea.

The earth trembled. Flames burst forth, vapors rose from the ground. Vesuvius spat out the fire of Hades. Wild voices clamored in the air. There was a moaning in the depths as if all the dead in the Orcus were about to break forth and come to life.

Temples fell to ruins, altars were destroyed, images of the gods opened their lips of marble

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or metal to utter a piercing cry of anguish. Many of them sank from their pedestals and were crumbled to dust.

As the sun so suddenly broke through its prison of clouds, the grotto which contained Tiberius and his retinue was flooded with azure light. The bodies which filled the basin of the imperial bath were cast high up by the furious waves, thrown against the rocks, and dashed to pieces.

Velosianus threw both his arms around the Cæsar, hastily dragged him away with him, up the narrow staircase, and into the subterranean passage.

They groped their way onward in the darkness. The ground shook beneath their feet. The rocks beside them tottered. They heard all around them a roaring and a rushing, moaning and cries of terror.

"Nothing but an earthquake!" said the Emperor.

"The new God!" cried Velosianus.

*

Amid the furious tumult of Nature they went on, and, in an apartment of the imperial villa, reached the upper world and daylight, in the gray-leadened hue of which flared the

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flames of a mystical sun which seemed covered by a black veil.

They found the palace deserted. Everything that drew breath had fled into the open air—as if the mountains could not burst and break as well.

The island was thronged with people, who mingled their cries with the voice of the tempest, and were calling upon the gods. Strange indeed was the spectacle of the many adorned youths and maidens of the Emperor. They crowded together like a fragment of eternal youth and beauty fallen from the opened skies. Pale and mute, they gazed at the revolt of raging Nature, whose hatred they feared less than the love of the Cæsar.

The Emperor's paralyzed soul seemed to revive at the sight of the general terror. A feeling of vital warmth and of joyousness came over him. He delighted in the spectacle of the elements let loose over his island as in a work of art, and relished the horror of the event as a thirsty man enjoys a refreshing drink.

No longer leaning on Velosianus, he passed down the marble way. His ample robe was swelled out by the storm, so that it seemed

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as if a purple figure were hovering over the depths.

Wherever the Emperor appeared the cries of terror ceased, and the host of satellites followed their lord in utter silence, and in trembling fear of death.

CHAPTER VIII

“It is finished !”

The Emperor and his train saw coming towards them, from the opposite direction, another silent procession, at the head of which walked a childlike, wondrous female form. It was enveloped from head to foot in garments of a luminous blue, its features were lit with ecstasy, and it had the gaze of a seer.

When the unknown reached the Cæsar, she extended both arms towards a blood-red sign in the vault of heaven, which bore the form of a huge cross. She pointed to it, and said, in Hebrew :

“And behold, Cæsar, it is finished !”

Tiberius asked :

“Who is this Jewish woman or child, or whatever the creature may be? And who brought her here?”

Upon this the young captain of the body-guard stepped forward and reported that he

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had found the stranger in a boat, with a corpse, in the bay by the blooming almond-trees. At the same time he looked at Velosianus, concerning whom, however, he said nothing to the Emperor.

Velosianus reported :

“I brought this stranger to thee.”

“Whence comes she?”

“From thy land of Judea, which is governed by Pontius Pilate.”

“Who has sent her?”

“She declares that her spirit led her over the sea to thee.”

“Who is she?”

“One raised from the dead.”

“Since when have the dead come to life?”

“Since the new God has appeared.”

“The new God?”

“This maiden preaches him. She preaches the new God, to whom thou hast had sacrifices offered as the Unknown God; the new God, whom thou wouldst create. He seems to be a God already created, living and mighty, for behold, he works miracles.”

Tiberius gazed thoughtfully at the Hebrew maiden. He was long silent. Then he commanded :

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“I would speak with the Jewess—alone!”

*

Velosianus waited for the Emperor and the Hebrew maiden. It was midnight, and the stranger was still with the Emperor in one of the inner apartments of the Villa of Jupiter.

In the bowels of the earth all had become silent, the tumult in the air had ceased. Not a star was to be seen. Only the wondrous heavenly sign in the heavens, the cross, was still glowing in the midst of darkness.

Still Velosianus was forced to wait.

At last a freedman summoned him to the Emperor.

He found Tiberius, his gray head supported by his hand, gazing fixedly upon the Jewess, who had sunk upon the carpet in death-like exhaustion.

The Emperor signed to Velosianus to draw nearer, and said :

“Look on her! She was a lovely child of twelve, full of life and laughter. Then she died. And the radiant man whom she calls Master, Messiah, and Son of God, said to those who were assembled :

“‘Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.’ And they

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laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he took the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entered in where the damsel was lying.

“‘ And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her : “ Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.”

“‘ And straightway the damsel arose and walked—’ ”

Tiberius ceased, looked at the child, who had been dead and had come to life again, thought awhile, and began anew :

“ Velosianus, look upon her ! See what has become of the lovely, laughing child, since it rose from the dead. And answer me truthfully whether it would not have been a thousand times better if this Master, Messiah, or Son of God—whatever they call him—had left the child with the dead ? She lay down to die as a lovely maiden, she rose from her death-bed as an unhappy woman ; more shadow than human being, although the hand of a god had been laid upon her ! And, Velosianus, tell me truthfully, what thinkest thou of a god who recalls the dead to such a life ? ”

But, instead of answering, Velosianus asked :

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“What else has she told thee of this living God?”

“That he is the son of a mortal woman and of the God of wrath of the Jews—that powerless God, my Velosianus, who led his people into captivity and keeps them in it.”

“What else did the Hebrew maiden say?” urged Velosianus, further.

“That this Son of God was born in a stable at Bethlehem; that wise men had come from afar to worship the child. Jesus of Nazareth they call the new Saviour of the world! And when the boy has become a man, he goes about in the land of Judea, works miracles, preaches the divinity of his Father and his own. He condemns all unbelievers and all those who do not repent. He promises the kingdom of heaven to all those who believe in him, and to all who are weary and heavy-laden, as well as to the widow and the fatherless, to children and to the poor in spirit.”

“O Cæsar! And does this maiden, who has been raised from the dead, know where this God of the lowly dwells now?”

At this there was a movement in the stony face of Tiberius. Around his thin, withered

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lips there hovered a smile—by the gods, Tiberius was smiling!

And, smiling, he said :

“My Velosianus, this new living God was crucified at Jerusalem yesterday for sedition, by my dear Pontius Pilate, and died on the cross, at the ninth hour. Thus the Hebrew maiden reported to me.”

“Cæsar! He died? How could he die, who raised others from the dead?”

“Perchance his Father, who sent him, will awaken him to life again. But what thinkest thou of a father who suffers his own-begotten, beloved son to be crucified, instead of nailing himself to the cross with fiery nails? Can he, whom his people call God Almighty, redeem mankind from its sins and its misery through the cross alone?”

And Tiberius continued to smile.

CHAPTER IX

WITH the life of the man called Jesus of Nazareth, the light of the whole world seemed to have become extinct. Dusk and silence continued, and the miraculous sign of the cross still flamed in the gloomy sky. It stood above the eastern horizon : there where, beyond the sea, lay the land of Judea.

The Hebrew maiden, who had foretold all these wonders to the Emperor, remained, with waking eyes, in a death-like slumber.

Since the new Messiah of the Jews, by his laying on of hands, had reopened her eyes after death had sealed them, it seemed as if she could not close them again.

Tiberius commanded that this child with the countenance of a dead woman and the soul of a prophetess be lifted up and laid upon a couch. A freedwoman remained beside her, to report her awakening to the Emperor without delay.

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It was one of the Cæsar's demoniacal days. He ordered a throne-like chair to be placed for himself in front of the Villa of Jupiter, upon the cliff overhanging the abyss. No one ventured near him.

The ruler of the Roman Empire desired to be alone!

Here, where his madness held its orgies, Tiberius sat, a lonely demon, at his feet the splendor of the world, which he would fain have shattered with a blow of his fist, in order—not to rebuild it.

He sat motionless. His gray head bowed upon his breast, he gazed at the sign of the cross in the heavens above the sea, and thought thoughts which had nothing to do with the deity, as man conceives it. He rejoiced at the death on the cross of the new God, and delighted in the sight of the bloody sign of his end on the malefactor's tree. The whole day long the Emperor remained alone with himself and his demon.

*

After Tiberius had taken a rest in the evening, he ordered his litter about midnight, and sent for Velosianus. Accompanied by him and a few of his favorites, he passed to the

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eastern shore, by way of a colonnade which stretched through blooming thickets, like a broad, luminous ribbon, from the summit to the sea. Here a barge was waiting, fitted out with dark-purple, almost black, cushions, and rich carpets, which trailed in the water. Behind the Emperor's seat strongly scented wood was burning in a golden basin.

Twelve young Ethiopian slaves served as oarsmen. They were nude and of splendid form. As Tiberius approached they stood motionless, like bronze images, which, at a sign from him, came to life and stirred. But no word of the Cæsar could have made them speak ; they were dumb.

Like a bird of the sea the barge shot along the shore in the direction of the main-land. As they flew past the two gigantic rocks which, close to each other, rise from the waves with inaccessible walls, Tiberius remarked :

“These rocks shall bear for me the bronze statue of my favorite hero. The demi-god, whom I consider greater than all the gods, shall stand with one foot on each of the cliffs, striding far, his magnificent body nude, his proud head, with its clustering locks and powerful features, erect, and both arms lifted

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high above it—from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot a rebel against the deity, and at the same time a king of life.”

“Of whom speakest thou, O Cæsar?”

“Of him whom I would rather resemble than Jove the Thunderer himself. In his lifted hands he holds the firebrand which he has snatched from the celestials. Waving the divine flame, Prometheus stands guard over my Caprea, warning the mariners not to come nigh these cliffs. For they would be dashed to pieces against them.”

Carried away by the boldness of this imperial thought, Velosianus cried :

“Thou wouldst need to have a second Caprea of metal melted down if thou wouldst have thy Prometheus—lighting the way for lost mariners astray—stand upon this rocky pedestal above the sea as great and mighty as thy spirit sees the Titan.”

Then Tiberius prophesied from the depths of his soul :

“I tell thee, Velosianus, ere long no single thing on earth will seem impossible to the Roman Cæsars.”

Suddenly the barge turned towards the rocks of the island, which appeared to open

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before the Emperor, and to close behind him again. There was a gloom about the place, as if this were the entrance to the Orcus, to the ever-dark realm of shadows.

At a spot strewn with soft sand the imperial barge silently touched the Stygian shore.

Velosianus alighted with Tiberius, and followed him to a high-vaulted cave. It was filled with a pale light by means of a fire which burned behind a high screen of green, delicately carved marble.

In the midst of this natural grotto-temple, above an altar of black, sparkling stone, there stood a dark, bronze statue. It represented a youth enveloped in pointed flames and waving a red-hot sword. With his other hand this demon or genius grasped the loosened hair of a woman crouching at his feet. The face of the conquered woman wore the features of a hetaira, while on the august countenance of him who held the sword was depicted a divine wrath.

An inscription upon the altar ran thus :

“This is the image of the great Unknown God, who scourges the infamous soul of humanity with a flaming sword. He is the God who is prayed for and prayed to

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by him who erected the image. This was the Emperor Tiberius, who despises the world in the same measure as he rules it."

"Read!" commanded the Cæsar.

And Velosianus read in a loud voice the words that were carved on the stone, and which the Emperor heard with satisfaction from the lips of the former king of priests.

Then he went on:

"What thinkest thou, Velosianus, who hast served so long in the temples of the heavenly lie: does it not seem to thee to be high time that, after so many idols, there should at last be a real God? Not to pardon and to bless, but to brand this harlot, humanity, with burning sword-strokes?"

Velosianus thought of the living God, to seek whom he would fain have gone out into all the world. But to the Emperor he said nothing of this unknown God, for the image which Velosianus had formed of him, and bore in his heart, surrounded by a calm lustre, resembled in no single feature the condemning, avenging, celestial spirit of the Cæsar.

Tiberius began to speak of the Master and Messiah of the Hebrew maiden. He said, scornfully:

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“Thou mayst be sure that the crucified and buried Son of Man will rise from the dead! When that happens, thou shalt bring him to me. Then we will lead the Nazarene to this temple, and show him this image. I will say to him: ‘If thou art in truth a God and a messenger, then snatch the sword from this image, and scourge—scourge—scourge! But thou, too, art merely the shadow and semblance of a divine being. For no god can come down to this world but one who is sent with the sword. I, the Emperor, tell thee he cannot!’”

Tiberius stood for a long while before the terrible image, giving vent in wild words to his contempt of the world, his hatred of man, and his longing for a supernatural, merciless judge and avenger.

For even this degenerate, mighty spirit yearned for a living God!

*

When the Cæsar, with Velosianus, left the temple “of the Unknown God,” the mariners guided the boat out of the night of the rocky cavern to the light of a cheerful morning.

Like a rosy bank of clouds the hills of the shore rested upon the gently undulating, azure

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sea. The air was filled with fragrance and vapor, like the incense of a sacrificial fire, and the heavens were aglow with such splendor of color that it seemed as if they were celebrating their triumph this day.

Even Tiberius marvelled; the cliffs of Caprea, which on this side of the island bore not even a blade of grass, had been thickly covered overnight with golden crocuses, the blossoms of a resuscitated nature. The whole rocky mountain was radiant.

*

On this day, as Tiberius had ordained, the Festival of Spring was to be observed on the island of Caprea.

When the barge landed, therefore, it was received by ecstatic priests of Adonis. They were decorated with wreaths of crocus, and lowered before the Emperor blooming branches of almond-trees, with which, too, the roads were strewn over which Tiberius had to pass. Every inhabitant of the island wore a wreath and bore a blooming branch; and as, on the Emperor's isle, only young and beautiful human beings were suffered to dwell, Velosianus on this morning truly fancied himself transported to Elysium.

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He was bidden to walk beside the litter of Tiberius, and heard the latter say :

“Behold, Velosianus, our gods are too beautiful, too intoxicated with their existence, and the life of man is too repulsive, too gloomy, too horrifying. For this reason alone our soul cries for a god who destroys beauty, and gives to life that which belongs to this hateful existence—mists and night, fear and curses, horror and disgust.”

Velosianus did not reply to such words of the brain-sick man. But his desire for a god who atones and reconciles, who redeems and blesses, a truly divine god, grew stronger and stronger.

The servants of the Emperor had worked day and night to obliterate all traces of the earthquake on the island ; Tiberius was not to be reminded by anything that there was under heaven a still greater power than that of the Cæsar. The mounds of rubbish and the crevices in the ground were hidden by blooming branches ; vines and carpets veiled the injuries to the masonry ; the shattered statues had disappeared.

The Emperor repaired at once to the Villa of Jupiter, where the sleeping Hebrew maiden

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had remained. She came to meet the two with agitated features and eyes staring with terror, and complained aloud :

“ I no longer see the Lord in his tomb hewn in the rock ! They have rolled back the stone from the door, and have taken my Lord away ! Only the linen clothes remain, and the odor of the spikenard with which Mary Magdalene anointed him. Oh, whither have they borne my dead Lord and Saviour ? ”

Tiberius looked fixedly in the face of Velosianus. Then he comforted the weeping maiden :

“ Thy dead Lord and Saviour has perchance risen from the dead. Behold, a new miracle ! Of all the miracles the last and greatest ! ”

But the Galilean maiden continued to complain :

“ They have borne Jesus from the sepulchre. I cannot see whither they have taken him. I must go to seek my Lord ! ”

“ Thou shalt go ! And this man will accompany thee,” commanded Tiberius, as he smiled for the second time.

CHAPTER X

ON the day before the Jewish Passover, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified at Jerusalem with two malefactors.

As the great Galilean miracle-worker breathed his last on the cross, the veil of the Jewish temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened.

Pontius Pilate, who governed the Roman province of Judea in the name of the Cæsar, and who had condemned the Galilean to death in the name of the Cæsar, had withdrawn to the innermost apartments of his spacious and magnificent palace. He would suffer no one to be admitted to him.

Before his bolted door, her garments rent, her hair loosened, crouched Claudia Procula, the young wife of the governor, passing her hands restlessly over the cedar-wood ornamented with gilt bronze, and crying incessantly :

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“Thou hast murdered a just man! Thou hast murdered a just man!”

In the beginning Pontius Pilate had sought to save the Galilean from the hatred of the Jews, for he had found no fault in him. Moreover, he recognized that this man was hungering for shame and suffering, was longing for the death of a malefactor, as one dying of thirst longs for water.

But an inner power, which was stronger than his judicial perception, forced the governor to do the will of the Galilean, and satisfy his yearning for the cross and a crown of thorns.

Again and again had the proconsul attempted to resist this strange power of the Nazarene, to which he found himself succumbing more and more. It was for this that he had gone out again and again from the judgment-hall unto the people assembled in the Forum; that he had declared unto them, again and again: “I can find no fault in him!”

In order to rouse the pity of the people, he commanded that the accused should be scourged, crowned with thorns, and clad in a purple robe. And thus, bleeding with stripes, covered with shame and ignominy, the won-

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drous, silent sufferer was led before the judgment-hall and shown to the people :

“Behold your King !”

In order that the Jews, moved by pity, should help him to release this innocent man, Pilatus bade them choose between the Nazarene and a fierce murderer.

But the Jewish people felt no pity ! They spared the life of the murderer, and cried, concerning the innocent man : “Crucify him ! Crucify him !”

Thus it had come to pass that Pontius Pilate, against his better judgment, was forced to follow the dark impulse within, and grant to the Galilean that for which he yearned : his last and supreme suffering on the cross.

Jesus of Nazareth desired martyrdom, and the proxy of the Roman Emperor, who had jurisdiction over life and death in Judea, was forced to bow to the powerful will of the Son of Man—as he called himself.

*

Jesus gave up the ghost. Signs and wonders took place. In Jerusalem darkness, confusion, and terror reigned. The Romans prayed to the luminous images of their beautiful and joyous divinities ; the Jews fled to their holy

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temple, and believed their priests, who declared that Jehovah was wroth with his people, because they had so long suffered his divine name to be blasphemed by the Nazarene.

Those who believed in the teachings of the Galilean, as well as his disciples, remained quietly within their houses. Without attaching special importance to the darkening of the sun and the trembling of the earth, they felt that Nature was in unison with their grief for their dead Lord. The few, however, who had stood beneath the cross at Golgotha, and had witnessed the death of "The King of the Jews," whether they were disciples, Jews, or Romans, said and felt: "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Pontius Pilate remained in his seclusion, covered his head with his toga, and listened to the lamentation of his wife: "Thou hast murdered a just man! Thou hast murdered a just man!"

Never before had Claudia Procula called upon her husband, either in love and tenderness or in grief and accusation.

The beautiful young Roman maiden had been married to the great governor against

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her will. She despised the mighty man, because he had accepted the forced surrender of a helpless woman. Childless, she dwelt in that magnificent house, which contained every luxury of the East, as rigid and as silent as one of the many marble statues that surrounded her. No tender suing on the part of the man versed in all the arts of seduction could win from this beautiful creature a look or a smile. Pontius Pilate, who feared nothing on earth but the displeasure of the Emperor, desired one thing above all others: the animation of the motionless soul of his Claudia Procula.

Now the miracle had been accomplished; the image of stone moved, was alive! But it did not live for him, not through him. Yonder "visionary" and "fanatic," as they called him, for whom he had prepared the martyrdom he desired, had worked the miracle—worked it merely by dying with malefactors as a malefactor!

Had the procurator of the Emperor judged righteously, had he resisted the desire of the people, not yielded to the longing of the enthusiast, and suffered him to live, the Galilean—Pontius Pilate recognized this too late—

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would not have brought danger to Claudia Procula's soul, but would have remained for her an ordinary man.

Joseph of Arimathea, one of the disciples of him who had been crucified, came and besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus that same night and lay it in a sepulchre that was hewn out of the rock.

With a pale face Pontius Pilate went forth, passed in silence by his wife as she crouched by the door, and granted in person the request of the disciple of the Nazarene. According to the law the body of one crucified should have hung upon the cross three days and three nights. But Jesus of Nazareth, even in death, compelled the Roman proconsul to show weakness and indulgence.

*

Early the next morning, on the great Jewish festival, Caiaphas, the high priest, was announced to the governor—a man who would fain have crucified himself if, by so doing, he could have been looked upon by his people as the expected Messiah or Son of God. Reluctantly, Pilate commanded the chief priest of the Jews in Jerusalem to be admitted to his presence.

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Caiaphas bowed low before the representative of the great Emperor, who sat motionless upon his seat covered with royal purple. In a soft, insinuating voice the shrewd Jew began to praise the divine justice of the mighty Cæsar, for which the wisdom of the proconsul had found expression: the traitor, who would not render unto Cæsar "that which was Cæsar's," and who had called himself a king, had been put to death. The entire Jewish people thanked the Cæsar, and his representative in Judea. The whole Jewish people was sorrowing that such a man had sprung from their midst, and all Israel vowed anew, through the mouth of Caiaphas, submission and fidelity to unconquerable Rome.

As a token of their gratitude, their sorrow, and their fidelity, the Jews of Jerusalem proposed to omit the celebration of the solemn Feast of the Passover.

Pilate listened to him with a weary look. His answer consisted of a question:

"What else wouldst thou have of me, Jew?"

It was but a trifle; an imperial seal and an imperial guard at the sepulchre hewn in the rock, where Joseph of Arimathea — the rich

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Joseph of Arimathea!—had, with the knowledge and consent of the procurator, laid the body of the crucified Galilean.

“Wherefore a seal? Wherefore a guard?”

“Only because of the blind superstition of the ignorant crowd,” replied the high priest, with humility. “Yon false miracle-worker and deceiving fisher of men proclaimed: ‘I shall die, but I shall rise again from the dead!’ If, therefore, the people were really led to believe that he had risen, then the august Pontius Pilate would have helped, against his will, to create a new God, a risen, and therefore immortal, omnipotent God!”

In order, therefore, that this new mighty God should not be able to rise again, the Jewish high priest entreated the wisdom of the Roman procurator to grant him a seal and a watch at the tomb of the crucified malefactor.

Pontius Pilate sat in deep thought. His languid gaze seemed to become extinct, his weary eyes closed. Caiaphas stood before the mighty man, and waited humbly till it should please him to speak. He looked upon the pale features, the withered lips, the drooping eyes of the representative of the divine Cæsar—he looked upon them with a smile: it was not the

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Jew Caiaphas who had judged and condemned the Jew Jesus of Nazareth, but the Roman Pontius Pilate ! It was a wise law, after all, which, in Judea, had deprived the conquered Jews of all jurisdiction over life and death : the responsibility thus rested upon the head of the Roman.

When the wise and righteous judge Pontius Pilate had, on the last judgment-day, washed his hands before all the multitude, saying : " I find no fault in him. See ye to it ! " and when the people answered and said : " His blood be on us and on our children ! " all responsibility still rested upon the man who alone could render judgment in Judea.

And Caiaphas continued to smile.

The governor opened his eyes.

He had read in his own soul and realized his fault. He said :

" The people must not believe in one risen from the dead ! I grant thee the seal and the watch ! "

Caiaphas humbly thanked the wise and cautious judge.

CHAPTER XI

PONTIUS PILATE repaired in person, under a dark, threatening sky, to the sepulchre hewn in the rock which belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. A great multitude followed the litter of the governor.

The road leading out of the city passed beneath the hill on which was situated the place of execution, called Golgotha.

Great gray vultures were circling around it, driving away the ravens, and hovering with solemn flapping of wings above the spot where the two malefactors still hung upon the cross. The carrion birds pecked at the heads and bodies of the corpses, thrust their beaks into the livid dead flesh, tore out a piece as booty, perched on the arms of the crosses, and gorged themselves with their prey.

Between the two mutilated crucified thieves there arose another cross. It was empty. But upon it there sat a large white dove.

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Fearlessly the gleaming bird rested upon the tree of death in the midst of the vultures, which did it no harm.

When the multitude saw the white dove, they pointed to the crosses with vehement gestures, and began to murmur among themselves. But the procurator commanded that the gentle bird should not be disturbed. It seemed to him as if there emanated from the snow-white feathers a radiance which, resembling pale moonlight, spread over the whole cross, so that it stood out against the dark sky, amid the dead bodies and birds of prey, like two transverse rays of light.

And it appeared to the excited senses of the governor as if the radiance from the cross flowed downward, descending the rock in narrow strips, and proceeding onward through a garden which had withered overnight, towards a high yellow wall of rock, at the foot of which it became extinct.

Now this was the way by which they had borne the dead Galilean from the cross to the sepulchre.

The ravens, driven off by the vultures, flew in dense flocks around the place of execution. With loud croaking they fluttered around the

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litter of the procurator, and gathered above his head in a dark, animated cloud.

At the entrance to the garden Caiaphas, with many priests, scribes, and pharisees, awaited the arrival of Pontius Pilate's train. They received it as if the Emperor himself, the godlike Tiberius, were approaching.

Pilate stopped, and sent some of his soldiers to the rock to roll away the stone from the tomb. For it was his intention to let the people see the body of the dead Galilean before he closed the sepulchre with a seal—the imperial seal.

A captain came back and reported :

“In front of the sepulchre a woman is crouching, who will not move.”

“It must be the mother of the Galilean. Bid her arise and go hence. But do thou not command, but entreat her.”

“The woman is young and beautiful. She has rent open her garment and covered her bosom with her hair, which glows like molten iron.”

Pilate left the litter and went towards the wall of rock by a narrow path. He walked with difficulty, with heavy feet, as if his soles adhered to the parched ground. He saw the

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tomb. The entrance seemed hung with a narrow carpet of the color of blood. But it was the flowing, long red hair of the woman, who was entirely enveloped in it. She pressed her body close to the stone which closed the sepulchre, and gazed at the approaching dignitary with a hostile expression in her gloomy, fever-lit eyes.

It was only by her hair, which flamed like a dark sunset glow, that the governor recognized the woman. For her glorious beauty, which had been radiant and victorious as the day, had passed away.

The woman's name was Mary.

This Mary was a Galilean Jewess from Magdala, on the Lake of Tiberias, and she had been a great hetaira. But she had never sold her favor, and no Roman could boast of ever having called her his mistress. She had refused to listen even to the all-powerful procurator. Gold and jewels which he had sent to her she had caused to be thrown out into the highway, and had walked over them surrounded by a throng of Jewish youths mad with love for her.

But then she had seen Jesus of Nazareth, had thrust all splendor from her, and come be-

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fore the Galilean in her sinful nakedness, to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. The Master had forgiven this sinner as well, and from that hour she had followed him, even to Golgotha and to the door of his sepulchre.

Pontius commanded the Galilean woman to withdraw. But she continued to bar the entrance to the tomb with her body. It was only when she learned that the governor and his retinue had come to see whether the disciples of the Nazarene had not borne away his body, that she drew back silently and reluctantly, but no farther than was necessary to have the heavy stone rolled away.

A high, dark vault appeared. The ceiling and walls of the grotto were covered with the tender leaves of the nymphæa, and from the damp ground pale blossoms were springing up. Above the flat stone which closed the grave, the women who mourned their dead master had heaped up a mound of yellow and white narcissuses.

The fragrance of flowers filled the sepulchre of the Son of Man.

Mary of Magdala uttered a smothered cry of woe, fell upon her knees, and stretched out

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her arms, as if she would have embraced the air which came from the tomb.

Pilate signed to Caiaphas, the high priest, and three other Jews of high station to enter the tomb with him. There he caused the flat stone to be lifted from the grave by two men.

After a few moments all left the sepulchre again, and Caiaphas declared to the people in a loud voice that the body of the crucified one was lying within the grave wrapped in fine linen. His three companions testified to the truth of his report.

But the Roman procurator said nothing. With a pale face he ordered the tomb to be closed again, attached with his own hands, by a broad purple ribbon, the imperial seal to the entrance, commanded the captain by a sign to remain with the guard, and, passing close to the woman of Magdala, at whom he did not even glance, returned to his litter, the curtains of which he at once closed.

Within the grave he had lifted the linen from the body of the Galilean and seen the face of the dead: never had a human countenance appeared to the Roman so divine in death.

CHAPTER XII

SINCE Pontius Pilate had looked upon the face of the crucified Nazarene, he had known no rest. He saw it before him constantly, felt himself haunted by it. He could not bear the sight of the pale, still features, and yet knew not how to escape from them.

One question tormented him incessantly :

“What if it be true, that—what if—what if—?”

These words pierced his soul, crept into his brain.

It was announced to the proconsul that one of the disciples of the Galilean had been found dead, having hanged himself at the place where the latter had been taken prisoner. On his inquiring who the man was, he was informed that it was the one, Judas by name, who had betrayed the Nazarene—for thirty pieces of silver!

Pilate commanded :

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“Let the traitor be dragged, by the rope with which he hanged himself, to Golgotha, and laid beneath the cross that bore his master. There the birds of prey shall eat him.”

This said, he withdrew to his apartments, and wrote to the Emperor a report of the Galilean's life and teachings, his crime, his condemnation, and his death. He felt constrained to prove to Tiberius that he himself would have accounted the Nazarene worthy of death.

As he wrote he saw delineated before him on the pale wax the countenance of the dead man. It was crowned with thorns, and the blood trickled slowly, slowly, from the damp locks over the white brow and the closed eyes.

The sunless day was followed by a black night. Unable to sleep, Pilate tossed upon his couch. He felt the mysterious power wielded over him by the dead magician of Nazareth growing and growing, and struggled against it as if he were on the verge of insanity.

He had never hated a living mortal enemy as fiercely as he now hated this man whom he had judged. He would fain have commanded that the body which he was having guarded like some precious possession be crucified

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again, were it only that he might be perfectly sure of the death of this Galilean.

In the middle of the night he arose and sent for the captain who had been on guard at the crucifixion of the Nazarene at Golgotha. The man appeared before the procurator, who asked him :

“Did the Galilean truly die? He hung on the cross only three hours! He surely cannot have died in truth, but must have merely seemed dead. Why were his legs not broken, as is the custom with crucified male factors?”

“Lord, the Galilean was dead in truth.”

“How canst thou prove it?”

“I took a spear and pierced his side.”

“And he was dead—stark dead? Nothing flowed from the wound?”

“Lord, blood and water flowed from the wound.”

“Blood and water? How can blood and water flow from a dead body? The Galilean is still alive!”

“Lord, I stood beneath the cross and saw him die.”

“How did he die?”

“Lord?”

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"How did that man die, of whom they said that he worked miracles?"

"Lord, not like a man."

"But—?"

"He died as if he had truly been that which his disciples say he was."

"A God? Can a God die? But thou also art one of those who believe in that lie!"

The captain did not reply.

*

Once more Pilate was alone. He felt his soul being scourged by his thoughts as he had caused the Nazarene to be scourged. Impostor or prophet? Fanatic or malefactor? Man or God? These doubts scourged the governor's soul till it bled.

He stole out of the palace and into the vestibule, and there stood in the darkness, staring over to the Prætorium, where he had examined and judged the Galilean.

Suddenly he was seized with a fear lest the watch at the sepulchre might be sleeping; the disciples of the Nazarene might break the seal and bear away the body, in order to announce to the world: "He is risen from the dead!" Then would the miracle be wrought for the

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people, and the God born from death, as the Jew Caiaphas had feared.

He would send messengers to the tomb at once !

But the mysterious power to which he had been subject for three days past impelled him to go himself.

As if pursued by the furies, he hastened out of the city, and to the garden of Joseph of Arimathea.

Like a thief he crept up to the tomb in the rock.

But the watch were not sleeping. They had made a cheerful fire of dead olive-branches, were lying around it, and keeping themselves awake by throwing dice, talking, and singing. They told of bloody battles in which they had taken part, of complaisant damsels whom they had kissed, and shouted forth lascivious songs.

The more noisy they became, the more relieved the governor felt. At the grave of this "Son of God " no angels were keeping watch, no miracles would be wrought.

With a lighter heart Pilatus returned homeward. It was still quite dark, so that he could reach the city and his house without being recognized. Just outside of the gate he met two

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persons, a man and a woman, the latter carrying a tall amphora upon her head.

The man said :

“Thine ointments are burdensome, O Mary!”

The woman answered, with bitterness in her voice :

“Not more burdensome than my sorrow.”

“Rest awhile !”

“What avails it if my feet rest ? My soul still remains weary unto death, and knows no rest.”

“We shall reach his tomb while it is yet dark,” the man went on, as he stopped and relieved the woman of the amphora. “The dawn tarries even to-day. When the Master died the sun was darkened. Since his eyes could no longer see it, it has not shone again.”

“The sun should never rise again to give light to those who crucified the Messiah!” cried Mary. “O Nicodemus, they have put my dear Lord to death !”

And, breaking out into lamentations, she threw herself into the dust of the highway.

Pilate had pressed close to a wall, did not move, and listened with bated breath. After a while Nicodemus said, in a firm voice :

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“Not alone for thee, Mary of Magdala, did the Christ die: Pontius Pilate caused Him to be crucified for all who are weary and heavy-laden.”

With this he was about to raise her, but she repulsed him vehemently, and cried:

“He died a hundred-fold more for me than for thee—for you all; for my transgression was a hundred-fold greater than your guilt! And now my anguish is a hundred-fold greater than your grief. The Master pardoned my sin, which was deeper than an abyss; he lifted me up out of my boundless sorrow. He brought back to life the body of the daughter of Jairus; but for me, he awakened my soul that was dead, so that it could arise and walk!”

“Thou wert faithful to the Master unto his death,” said Nicodemus, in confirmation of her words.

Mary of Magdala arose, and, after a while, continued, very calmly:

“When these craven Romans were taking him from the judgment-hall to show to the Jews their new King, I stood in the midst of the people. The sight of him would have moved rocks, and caused the breezes to sigh

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for sorrow. But these men and women only cried: 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' And when the timid judge, who found no fault in him, yet condemned him to death—when he washed his hands and said: 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it!' I cried: 'His blood be upon them and on their children!' And they all repeated, 'His blood be upon us and on our children!' They all cursed themselves and their descendants to the last generation."

The man with the low and gentle voice answered, sadly:

"Thou dost hate the enemies of the Master. Dost thou not know that the Lord forgave them when he died?"

The woman answered: "I stood beneath the cross and witnessed his dying. I had been suffered to wash his feet with my tears and wipe them with my hair, but I could do nothing to allay the agony of his death. When I beheld him drinking the cup to the last drop, and when I heard him exhort us to love those who hate him, to bless those who curse him, and to forgive those who had crucified him—I felt that I was not, in truth, the Saviour's disciple."

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"Mary! O Mary!"

But she continued:

"For I hate those who hate him; I curse those who cursed him; I would fain do evil to those who did evil to him!"

"Come to his tomb!" cried Nicodemus, anxiously. Then he added:

"Ah, how shall we enter it, since the governor has sealed it and put a watch before it?"

Mary lifted her jug from the ground and placed it upon her head.

She answered, calmly:

"My longing to reach my dead Lord is stronger than watch and seal. My longing alone will drive away the watch of the craven judge and break the seal."

The two went on in the direction of the tomb.

*

The Roman detached himself from the wall and proceeded on his way. Filled with amazement, he thought:

"What power is this which causes a hetaira to speak thus, and the procurator of the Emperor thus to go abroad by night? And what if this power bursts living from its tomb, rolls along as a heavenly stream of fire, ignites the

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earth, spreads over the whole universe? Can such a thing be possible? Such a force must be checked. It must be destroyed, strangled, crucified. Each one of the followers of the Galilean must be led to his Golgotha!"

But when Pilate would have entered his house by the secret portal, he was forced once more to press himself against the wall, in order not to be seen and recognized. A troop of night-revellers came to meet him: Jewish youths with Syrian women, who were striking cymbals and playing the lute. The noisy company stopped just in front of the palace, and Pilate heard a man's voice, drunk with wine and kisses, saying:

"Come, let us make some music for the great procurator of the Emperor! In truth, it should be a caterwauling; for if this noble Roman had had his will, your fine, merry Barabbas would now be hanging on the cross yonder; and, instead of enjoying the kisses of women's lips, he would be billing and cooing with vultures and carrion-birds. Strike your lutes and cymbals, therefore, and sing! Let your song be of wine, and women, and earthly things! Waken the lean Roman with our boisterous joy of life! He is, perchance,

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just dreaming of his proud Claudia Procula, whom he may not embrace save in his dreams; this mighty ruler, who was constrained to let a merry murderer go free and have a sorry miracle-worker crucified at the people's command. Strike! sing! Sing for the glorious judge of the divine Tiberius a song of Barabbas, who is revelling in life and in love. Kiss me, my white Syrian turtle-doves!"

The mad troop laughed and shouted, played and sang; and Barabbas cried anew:

"Hear ye me! I have a sublime idea. To what does your charming Barabbas owe it that he can spend this night so joyously with you? To what but the wisdom and justice of the great judge? But why was Pontius Pilate so wise and just? Because the Jewish people demanded it of him! Why did the stupid rabble demand wisdom and justice of the great judge? Because it hates a wise and just man more than a sinner and a murderer! Without this divine Galilean your sweet Barabbas would infallibly now be hanging upon the cross. Therefore this great miracle-worker was my benefactor, and every man owes gratitude to his benefactor, if he is not a beast. Let us go, then, to his tomb, there sing a fine

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solemn dirge in his memory, and hang up at the entrance the garlands of our mistresses. Come, sing, strike, play! O sweet life! O divine love!"

With this the wild troop hastened on.

With cold, damp hands Pilate opened the secret portal.

At that moment it seemed to him as if he saw, in the dim dawn of morning, hovering downward from heaven in the direction of the tomb, a form, luminous as the lightning.

CHAPTER XIII

A DAY of spring broke, of a radiance as if three suns had risen in the heavens. Around Jerusalem boundless fields of scarlet poppies had blossomed, so that the gleaming city rose up from a blood-red sea of flowers. Great golden butterflies were hovering over it in throngs, and the air, filled with all the fragrance of the south, resounded with the triumphant jubilee of larks.

“Risen from the dead! Risen from the dead!”

Pilate was awakened by this cry from a slumber into which profound exhaustion had thrown him shortly before daybreak. He did not rise, however, thinking that it was the wild voices of his dream which had startled him.

“Risen from the dead! Risen from the dead!”

Strange! The voices of his dream were flung back by a thousand-fold echo. They

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reverberated in the palace, resounded in the Forum, penetrated all the streets, filled the whole city.

“Risen from the dead! Risen from the dead!”

Pilate was not dreaming.

With a muffled cry he started up. At that moment one of his attendants drew back the curtain over the door and reported, with pale, disturbed features, that a shouting multitude was crowding around the portal, and that in the hall of the great audiences Caiaphas was waiting, with many Jewish priests and scribes.

When the procurator entered the hall, Caiaphas came to meet him with the words:

“Lord, the disciples of the Galilean have bribed thy captain and the watch to say that an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and blinded their eyes and senses with his radiance. The bold robbers tore the seal of the august Cæsar from the stone, entered the grave, and bore the body away. Now the people say: ‘This crucified, dead, and buried malefactor is the Christ, the Messiah and Son of God; for he, who brought the dead to life, is himself risen from the dead.’ Lord, lord, suffer not the divine name of the Emperor to be

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abused. Seek the guilty, punish the impostor, judge, and avenge !”

“Procurator, judge and avenge !” cried all, lamenting, with lifted hands.

Pilate stood motionless in the midst of the passionately agitated group. For a long time he spoke not a word. Then he said, as if he were speaking to himself in deep solitude :

“What is truth?”

He had asked himself the same question once before, in the hour when, before his tribunal, he had tried the “King of the Jews,” found him innocent, and yet condemned him.

Followed by Caiaphas, the priests, and the scribes, he left the palace. The Forum was crowded with people : Romans, Syrians, and Hebrews. The Romans rejoiced that there was something for them to hear and to see, while the Hebrews acted as if mad. They raged : the man for whose sake Herod, of yore, had caused all the innocent children in Bethlehem to be killed, who would deny the kingdom of heaven to all those who are rich, who had forgiven a shameless adulteress her sins—could such a man have risen from the dead ?

None of the disciples of the Nazarene were to be seen. They had fled from the fury of

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the people, and taken refuge in the mountains of Galilee.

Then there was dragged before the governor a woman who openly acknowledged herself to be a follower of the Galilean, and held her shining head very high. Like one ecstatic and transfigured, Mary Magdalene passed through the raging, howling crowd which surrounded her. In it were many women of ill repute, who, after a night of pleasure, still wore wreaths of crushed and faded roses in their hair.

The once celebrated Jewish hetaira, who had renounced the sweet worship of Aphrodite, had been found before the open tomb, where she spoke like one bereft of her senses.

“See ye the flowers which are springing from his grave? Where his pale head was laid red roses grow, and where his pierced feet rested white lilies are blooming. The linen and the napkins in which we wrapped his body are all radiance! And when I wept, not finding my dear Lord in his sepulchre, an angel spoke to me. He shone like lightning, sat on the right of the tomb, and asked:

“‘Woman, why weepest thou?’

“I told the shining one my sorrow, and heard behind me a voice, which asked again:

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“ ‘ Woman, why weepest thou ?’

“ And I turned myself, and saw a man standing and knew him not, but entreated him, saying : ‘ Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.’ And he said unto me :

“ ‘ Mary !’

“ Then I knew him, and said :

“ ‘ Master !’

“ He is risen from the dead—risen from the dead !”

Reviled by the people and dragged to the judgment-hall by her glorious red hair, Mary Magdalene stood before Pilate, with a rapt look in her eyes, a sweet, ecstatic smile upon her lips. Stern threats and questions on the part of the governor drew from her, again and again, but the one answer :

“ He said unto me : ‘ Mary !’ And I answered : ‘ Master !’ He is risen from the dead—risen from the dead !”

Then Pilate tried another course. He asked the woman of Magdala :

“ If thy Master is risen from the dead, he must be on the earth. Where is he ?”

Still with the ecstatic smile upon her lips,

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the follower of the crucified Nazarene answered the procurator of the Emperor :

“ Seek him.”

At this Pilate commanded that the mad-woman should be cast into prison.

*

The soldiers who had guarded the sepulchre reported that they had been startled by a luminous apparition, and nearly stupefied by a strong odor of flowers, so that they had fallen to the ground senseless. Caiaphas and his adherents, however, among whom were numbered all the Jews of the city, continued to assert that the disciples of the Galilean had bribed the watch and stolen the body. Now it would be easy for them to represent the disappearance of the dead body as a miracle—as the greatest of miracles—which would exalt the son of Joseph the carpenter to be the Son of God.

The governor caused investigations to be set on foot, sent out spies, had suspicious persons arrested and threatened with torture.

But he discovered nothing.

Until late at night the Hebrews besieged the Prætorium and Pilate's palace, clamoring for their rights and for justice, as if their sacred

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faith itself had been murdered. For they feared the Galilean more, now that he was dead and had vanished, than they had hated him when he lived and worked miracles.

Pilate sent his spies in all directions, but there was one spot and one house to which he purposed to repair in person.

There he would learn "what is truth!"

CHAPTER XIV

TOWARDS sundown the governor ordered his litter, and, with a small retinue, followed the road which leads, along a brook, from Jerusalem to Jericho.

The bed of the brook Kedron was enveloped in pale narcissuses, and when the little train reached a narrow, rocky gorge, above which the walls of the city of Zion rose up majestically, its wild, rough sides shone in the twilight as if the light of the full moon were resting upon them.

In the midst of a wide plain, which was covered with blossoms as far as the eye could reach, lay a small town, inhabited almost entirely by Jews. All the houses resembled each other. With low walls and flat roofs, the habitations were crowded close together like a band of human beings who seek protection one with the other.

It was a lovely moonlight night. The little

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town lay in solitude, gleaming and fragrant. The stillness of the Sabbath and solemn peace rested upon Bethany, where, since the crucifixion of her son, the most sorely afflicted of all mothers had dwelt.

At the gate Pilate ordered the bearers to stop, left the litter, and commanded that no one should follow him : he would seek the house of Lazarus alone. He followed a path which led, behind the houses, along gardens and fields.

The Galilean's mother would know where his disciples had hidden the body ; his mother would reveal it to the prætor of the Emperor.

Through the own mother of the Son of Man, Pilate designed to overthrow the blind belief of the ignorant multitude, and divest him " who was risen from the dead " of his divinity.

*

He was still seeking some one who could show him the way when he heard voices. They came from a garden which Pilate was approaching by a narrow path. He strode along between two odorous bulwarks, seeing of the earth only the masses of flowers gleaming in the moonlight.

He found himself at the edge of a field,

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which lay behind a small, humble house. The field was overgrown with sweet-smelling herbs, from which the Jewish women prepared perfumes and ointments. Tall white lilies bordered the paths, along which two female forms were moving. One of them was delicate and slender, and wore her light garment with a peculiar grace.

Just as Pilate was about to come forward and ask the two for the house of Lazarus, he heard them talking of him whose dead body he was seeking.

The shorter and less comely of the two women said, in a bitter tone of voice :

“If what they say were true, and he had wrought upon himself the miracle which he wrought upon our brother, and risen from the dead this morning, would he not have come to his mother long ago? She is yonder in the house, watching and waiting, waiting in mortal anguish. The disciple to whom the Master said on the cross that he should be his mother’s son henceforth, and whom he loved above all others, is with her. But she will not be comforted even by John. No, the enemies of our Lord have borne away his body, so that we may not even mourn beside his grave,”

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With a sweet, gentle voice the other replied :

“ O Martha, Martha ! Art thou still of little faith ? ”

With hardly suppressed passion Martha cried :

“ It is of him that thou hast learned evermore to chide my faith ! My faith is no weaker than thine. It is only different, just as I am different from thee. I cannot sit for hours and days, with folded hands, sighing and hearkening. I must needs keep my hands busy. I must do something. The Master was an hungered and athirst, and would fain eat and drink. If I were like thee, he would have been constrained to hunger and thirst in our brother's house. And yet he reproached me, even as thou art doing now, only because I say that if he were yet alive he should have come first to his mother, who, for his sake, bears a dagger in her heart. Instead, he is said to have appeared first to this Mary Magdalene, to have spoken first to that woman. I will never believe that ! ”

“ Thy great love for the Master makes thee jealous of all those whom he loved the most,” replied the gentle one. “ Thou dost envy

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John and Mary Magdalene the Master's great love."

But Martha cried, angrily :

"Wouldst thou tell me that the Master loved that woman with the fiery hair and the unbridled soul? His holy spirit has forgiven her her sin and breathed on her soul, as his divine breath passed over the cheek of the leper. But in no other way did he have aught in common with her."

Pilate heard the other woman sigh gently.

The two stood so near him that he could clearly distinguish their features in the moonlight. The one who had heaved the sigh had the delicate, calm face of one who is incurably ill, with eyes which seemed still fixed upon the lips of the miracle-worker of Nazareth. Martha's pleasing features were vehemently agitated, as if she were struggling with difficulty against a heavy grief, caused not alone by the death of the Master, but also by the memory of admonishing and chiding words which had been called forth in him by her active and joyous nature.

After a short silence the sisters spoke of their brother Lazarus, who had gone to Galilee, where, as had been declared by Mary Mag-

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dalene, the risen Master would show himself to his disciples.

Again Martha said — and she said it in a voice as if she were struggling with tears :

“And he does not come to his mother ! He leaves his mother in mortal anguish. He leaves his mother with the death-wound in her heart !”

“This son does not belong to his mother, but to all mankind.”

“As if this mother had not, like all other mothers, borne her son with sorrow !” cried Martha, passionately.

This said, the two went on and disappeared among the lilies of the path.

*

Pilate approached the house slowly.

He had, indeed, learned through the conversation of the two women that the mother of the Galilean knew nothing about his dead body, and that she, too, believed in the miracle of the resurrection. But the governor would fain see the woman who had “surely borne her son with sorrow.”

Avoiding a meeting with the sisters, he drew near the house and entered the vestibule, on which a chamber opened.

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Stretched across the threshold there lay a woman, as if sunk down in despair.

The governor addressed her :

“Mary of Nazareth, wife of Joseph the carpenter !”

At the sound of his voice the woman rose. Motionless she stood before him, and signed to him silently, with an imperative gesture, to leave the house in which the waiting mother abode.

With a cry Pilate staggered backward. It was his own wife who was guarding the threshold of the chamber in which abode the mother of the Galilean crucified by him ; his own wife, who had been drawn by the Nazarene from the palace of her husband and to the lowly house in Bethany.

“The vengeance of him who was crucified has begun !” thought Pilate, his soul annihilated.

CHAPTER XV

THE high priest, too, caused secret search to be made for the stolen dead body, as if it were his aim to discover for the people of Jehovah the fountain of all life.

The Jews blasted out caves in the rocks, searched vaults, and explored the wildernesses from Jerusalem to Galilee for the body of him who had been crucified: if once it could be exhibited to the people, even the blind would see the lie, the lame grasp the deception.

Therefore, the body, the body!

The excitement of the people, as well as that of the secret adherents of the Master, grew from hour to hour. He that was risen from the dead was said to have shown himself in various places. Even on the first day of the miracle he was seen at Emmaus, and later on in Galilee, where he had appeared in the open country, or in a room with closed

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doors, or on a mountain. It was rumored that he had taught and prophesied; that he had bidden an unbelieving disciple touch his hands and feet, and had even sat at meat with his followers.

But no eyes had seen him save those of his rapt adherents, among whom there were many visionary spirits—in particular many enthusiastic women.

This fact was made use of by the opponents of the Nazarene, openly to accuse his adherents of fraud. They cried:

“Why does this Son of God, who is risen from the dead, appear only to fanatic souls and diseased minds? Why does he not show himself to us, likewise? Let him come; let him present himself in the temple, or in the Forum, or in the governor’s palace? Let him pass through the midst of the people, so that all may witness the wondrous miracle. What is this divine spirit, that it so carefully hides itself? And how can a God risen from the dead be touched and taken hold of? How can this glorified body take food and drink? The whole is a lie—a lie—a lie! The followers of the Galilean are naught but fools and senseless women. But such sickness of the

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spirit is contagious, like the plague. We must seek a remedy; we must find the stolen body!"

Day by day the Jews had been seeking in vain for the dead body, when two Hebrews, who were in the secret service of Caiaphas, met, among the mountains, a young shepherd. These men had known the Nazarene very well, and now it seemed to them as if they saw him before them, watching his flocks on the flowery heath. They joined the young man, and spoke to him familiarly, but heard at once, from his speech, that he was from Samaria.

Like all shepherds, he was a shy, quiet youth, who knew little of the world beside his lonely pastures and the life of the wilderness. He served a rich master, and had many fellow-servants, who, with their flocks, were scattered among the mountains. According to the season, they drove their sheep and goats to greater heights or down towards the plain. They built them huts with the rushlike twigs of the golden-broom and the branches of the white-flowering heath; they prepared their beds of dried fragrant grasses, lived on milk, cheese, and bread-cakes, which they baked between two red-hot stones, and knew not what happened in the world.

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It was only of the mighty Romans that they had heard something, and of the divine Emperor Tiberius. And they knew about the great miracle-worker of Nazareth.

The young shepherd did not ask the two spies of Caiaphas about the Romans nor about the Emperor. But he asked : “ Does the Galilean still work miracles ?”

At the same time his dark eyes grew large and luminous, and a deep longing was expressed in his mournful gaze.

“ Wouldst thou have him work a miracle on thee ?” replied the Hebrews, with a laugh. “ Thou art neither lame nor blind, that he could give thee back thy sight or make thee walk. Perchance, therefore, thou wouldst have him change the milk of thy goats and sheep into gold, so that thou couldst steal it from thy master ?”

The shepherd could not tell them what he would have the Galilean do for him, nor what he longed for. He merely wished to hear about him, and listen quietly. If he had not been a faithful servant he would have left his flocks, and would have wandered on, as far as his feet would have borne him, to look upon the Nazarene—even if only from afar !

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Then the men said to him :

“The Galilean is dead !”

The shepherd could not understand how such a man could die, how Heaven could permit it.

“He was crucified !”

The shepherd uttered a loud cry, as if his own brother had been nailed to the cross.

He stammered :

“Why was he crucified ?”

“Because he was a false prophet, an impostor, and a malefactor.”

At this the shepherd turned and silently strode away from the two men into the flowery sea of the pasture, the many-colored waves of which met over his head. The Hebrews looked at each other significantly, read in each other's souls, and said :

“This man would joyfully suffer himself to be crucified for the Galilean.”

They said it as softly as if they had not been alone in the wilderness. Then they followed the shepherd, spoke to him again in a friendly manner, and asked if they might spend the night in his hut.

The lonely youth bade them welcome.

But he asked them nothing more.

CHAPTER XVI

ON the fifth day after the Galilean's miraculous resurrection from the dead, a rumor arose in Jerusalem that two Hebrews had found the body of him who had been crucified. It was said that the Nazarenes, who had stolen the dead man, in order to exalt the tradition of his immortality and divinity to a new faith, a new religion, had borne the corpse into a secluded part of the mountains, and there thrown it into a deep pit. A young shepherd from Samaria had witnessed the proceeding unseen, and informed the messengers of Caiaphas of it, as well as assisted them in securing the body. This had been a dangerous undertaking, in the course of which the young shepherd had slipped, and fallen into one of the deep abysses of the mountains.

The head of the body discovered bore the marks of the crown of thorns, and its side showed the wound made by the spear. The

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face was of great, almost divine, beauty, and showed not the slightest trace of decomposition.

This apparent miracle found its natural explanation in the circumstance that the pit into which the robbers had thrown their booty was full of snow, which, in those deep mountain-crevices, would often remain unmelted until late in the summer.

In Jerusalem the excitement caused by the discovery of the corpse was intense. Even the Romans, nerveless and satiated by a thousand stimulating influences as they were, took part in the universal agitation.

Caiaphas and the whole body of priests broke out into triumph. The Jews marched through the streets with jubilant cries, as if Jehovah had won a victory over all his enemies, and Pilate was forced to appoint a guard of Roman soldiers to protect the adherents of the Galilean from the unchained fury of popular passion.

He caused sacrifices to be offered to the gods in all the temples, promised festivals and magnificent processions, and conferred upon the two Hebrews who had detected the fraud an ample reward.

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The discovered body was to be publicly exhibited in the Forum, before the portico of the Prætorium, so that every one could look on it, and testify :

“ Behold the crucified and dead Galilean !”

On account of the populace, the body was brought to Jerusalem secretly and by night, and at once placed on a bier on the steps of the Prætorium : entirely nude, the head higher than the feet, so that it could be well seen by the multitude. A barrier was placed in front of the bier, and a guard set to protect it.

From his palace Pilate watched the carrying out of his commands, then ordered every one to withdraw, and repaired to the spot alone, in order to satisfy himself with the sight of him who was dead in truth.

A fire of pitch was burning at the head of the dead man, and shed a dark glow over the pale face. Pilate stood before it and gazed upon it with greedy eyes.

Yes—yes—yes, it was he ! This was the head crowned with thorns, this the face—buffeted, spit at, degraded—of the prophet of Nazareth, the “ King of the Jews !” This was the face which haunted the proud representative of the Emperor even in his dreams, pur-

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sued his soul like a hunted deer. This was the face from which he could never escape. Now it would leave him in peace—now, since he had seen it once more, seen it *thus*!

For when he had looked upon this same face in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, how totally different it had seemed to him!

Sublime, holy, divine!

And why had he deemed it so unearthly, so full of majesty, and so beautiful?

Because he had not yet learned to know the truth, because he had not yet silenced the voice within him which whispered to him: "What if it were true, that—what if—what if?"

But now—now, he saw the truth!

It lay there before him, bodily. He could feel it and touch it. And the truth was: the actual death of the "Son of God!"

It was only a man, and not a God, whom Pontius Pilate had caused to be crucified.

*

All who had seen the Galilean, and now looked upon the dead body exhibited, said:

"It is he!"

They passed before the bier in crowds. The Romans thronged to the spot as if they were to witness a spectacle or a combat of gladiators

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in the arena. The Jews filled the city with their triumph over the adherents of the new God, whom his death unmasked as an impostor.

Pilate commanded that the woman of Magdala be set free and brought to the spot. Motionless the great sinner stood before the body of him who had forgiven her her guilt and absolved her from all sin. Her eyes wandered over the dead, her features bespoke anguish ; she, too, who had first declared the miracle, seemed to recognize him who had risen from the dead.

But surely he had appeared to her before the empty tomb ! She had spoken to him ! He had said to her :

“ Mary ! ”

And now he lay before her here, dead, a corpse, like any other !

Despairingly, in a piercing voice, she called on him :

“ Master ! Master ! Master ! ”

The populace, which witnessed this occurrence, laughed and jeered and cried mockingly in chorus :

“ Master ! Master ! Master ! ”

A woman of ill-fame tore the wreath from

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her head, made her way through the crowd to the poor creature, who stood there as if bereft of reason, calling without ceasing upon the name of the dead, placed the crushed wreath of pleasure upon her head, and cried :

“Behold the bride of the Master of Nazareth !”

And all the people jeered with the hetaira.

*

The procurator was informed that the woman of Magdala, too, recognized the dead body as that of the Galilean, and was asked what should be done with the impostress. Pilate commanded that the poor fool be set free.

Towards evening the populace, which was still crowding in front of the Prætorium, was once more seized with a lively excitement.

It was said that the mother of the Galilean was coming to look on her dead son.

A deep silence fell upon the multitude.

The crowd parted and left a broad path through the whole Forum. Amid the brooding breathlessness of thousands a group of Jewesses drew nigh. They supported in their midst a woman who walked with heavy, dragging steps, and had a wondrous countenance,

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pale as wax, which was sanctified by the bitterness and at the same time the most sublime sorrow.

This woman saw naught of Romans or of Jews. She saw naught of the whole world but the one goal towards which she was moving.

Now she discerned, amid the many-colored columns of the marble portico, the lofty, glaring bier of boards on which lay the dead man who was believed to be her son. A single motion, a single gesture bade the women who surrounded her step aside.

She went forward alone.

She stood before the bier. She ascended the steps; she opened her arms wide; she would have embraced the dead and laid her head on his bosom—she drew back slowly.

What meant this? What had happened? What had come over this mother that she feared her son? Who could this be that the woman who had borne him would not kiss him?—that she recoiled from him in horror and in fear?

Who was he?

Not her son!

CHAPTER XVII

IN vain Caiaphas and the entire priesthood of the city of Zion spoke to the people, and demonstrated that the dead man was in truth the crucified Galilean—the people did not believe its priests. In vain the exalted procurator of the divine Cæsar himself assured the doubters: “It is he! Verily and truly it is he!” The people did not believe the representative of the Emperor. The people believed the mother, whose horror, as she was about to throw her arms around the dead man, denied aloud that he was her son.

The shuddering recoil, the dismay of the most sorrowful of mothers, spoke to all the people as with tongues of angels.

A revolt broke out. The irate people tore the body of the false Galilean from the bier, dragged it through the city, and cast it into the potter’s field, where the lepers were buried. They impetuously demanded the surrender of

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the two Hebrews who pretended to have rescued the dead body from the pit filled with snow. They threatened the priesthood of the Holy Temple. They raged furiously and unceasingly, until the cowardly Caiaphas finally declared that the two Hebrews had confessed that, for the sake of the high reward offered them, they had committed a fraud: that they would be tried and the deception punished.

But the excitement of the popular mind was not allayed. Like a fire before the wind, it spread and inflamed the soul of the people. With dismay Pilate and Caiaphas, as well as the Jewish and Roman priests, became aware that the general fanaticism was gaining more and more ground, and the little band of followers of the Galilean constantly increasing in numbers.

At night, by the light of the full moon, groups of women wandered through the streets with rapt gaze, the blessed name of the risen Master on their ecstatic lips.

The strange procession was headed by the fairest, proudest, and most exalted of the Roman women: Claudia Procula herself, the wife of Pontius Pilate!

The impression made upon the people by

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this new disciple of the prophet was a powerful one. The beautiful Claudia had cast all splendor from her, and appeared in the dark garb of poverty, walking beside Mary of Magdala, around whom she had thrown her arm in a sisterly fashion. Ecstatically she preached the doctrine of him who was crucified, the new faith of all who are poor and lowly, all who weep and mourn, all who are weary and heavy-laden, which beamed into the dark night of earthly sorrow like the sunrise blush of a new, golden day.

The procurator attempted to have the fanatic women dispelled and taken into custody. But the people resisted vehemently.

Mary Magdalene cried, ecstatically :

“Let them take us ! Let them stone us and crucify us for the sake of the Messiah ! We must needs suffer for our Saviour’s sake here on earth ! We must needs be stoned and crucified in his name ! It is only through pain and suffering that we can enter into joy and eternal life ! Stone us, crucify us ! Let us follow our Master to Golgotha in throngs and throngs !”

*

It so happened the next morning that a mes-

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senger of the Emperor arrived in Jerusalem from the island of Caprea. As such, and also because of his own personality, which was well known to the procurator by reputation, the ambassador of the Cæsar was received by Pilate at his palace with great honor.

The governor rose from his raised seat in front of the gilded niche adorned by a statue of the divine Emperor. Surrounded by a numerous retinue, he went forward, bent with weariness, to meet the stranger. The latter wore, over his white garment, an amethyst-colored toga, and was accompanied by a young and noble-looking captain of the Emperor's body-guard.

"I welcome thee, Velosianus, to the province and the city of our august Emperor, whom may the eternal gods bless!"

Velosianus returned the greeting of the procurator, and then delivered to him a letter from the Emperor. Pilate touched the seal of his master with his lips, broke it, loosened the cords of purple silk which held the roll together, and read the words which had been traced by the Emperor's own hand:

"The Emperor Tiberius to Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judæa, greeting! This my ser-

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vant and friend, Velosianus of Ameria, will say to thee that which thou shouldst hear, as if the Emperor were speaking to thee."

Pilate read and asked :

"What are the commands of my august master? I hearken!"

He said it almost humbly. For this man smiled at Jove the Thunderer, and cringed before the hermit of Caprea.

As the governor was escorting the ambassador of the Emperor to the apartment in which he received only guests of the highest rank, Velosianus inquired after the health of the noble Claudia Procula, whose beauty was as much spoken of on the banks of the Tiber as on the shores of the African Sea. But the former king of priests had not learned what change had come over the wife of the procurator.

Turning pale, Pilate answered :

"We are living in a time of decline and change in all things. A spirit has been awakened in man which revolts against everything that the gods and the Roman Emperors have made a law. Philosophers and fanatics have risen up, who undermine the worship of the celestials and the divinity of the Cæsar.

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Their power divides friend from friend, children from parents, wives from their husbands—Claudia Procula left my house, and is following a crucified and risen Messiah of the Jews.”

“One who is dead?”

“A fanatic from Galilee, who called himself a king, and whom I caused to be crucified because of his revolt against the authority of the Cæsar.”

“And who rose again from the dead?”

“As is said by those who are subject to the demon of belief in miracles. My own wife walks the streets of Jerusalem and proclaims the new God, whose spirit and nature I could not crucify! The spirit of the Nazarene rose from the dead, transforms souls, and alienates them from the gods and the Cæsar. A great sickness has broken out, more baleful than the plague! It must be healed with fire and sword!”

*

The two men sat together in the apartments of the procurator, and Pilate hearkened to the marvellous story of the dream-walking maiden who had come to Italy, proclaimed the divinity of the Galilean, and had declared to the Emperor things which were occurring in Galilee

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while the child raised from the dead was reporting them to the Cæsar.

Velosianus concluded :

“The Emperor has sent me to seek him who is risen, and conduct him to Caprea. The Emperor’s mind and spirit are grievously sick, and he would learn whether this great miracle-worker can work a miracle on him too. Thou, my Pilate, shalt help me seek the risen God, whose life the Emperor demands of thee through me. Woe unto thee if it is not restored to him ! It would be avenged on thee, as if it were the divine life of the Cæsar himself ! Therefore, I say unto thee, seek !”

Thus the vengeance of the crucified malefactor drew closer and closer circles about the man who had caused him to be put to death.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT dawn of day a mother left the village of Bethany. Several women and a fair, mild youth accompanied her, and were loath to part with her.

But the mother desired to go on her way entirely alone.

The youth entreated her :

“Suffer me to walk behind thee ! I will not come to thy side unless thou call me. Behold, thou wilt grow weary, and I will support thee. Thou wilt grow thirsty, and I will lead thee to a well. The sun will scorch thy head, and I will hold a palm-leaf over thee. Suffer me to remain with thee !”

But the mother answered :

“A mother who goes to meet her son never wearies. Such a mother feels neither thirst nor the burning sun. Suffer me to go to meet my son alone. For he will surely come to-day !”

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"This is the eighth morning on which thou hast gone out to meet him; and each time thou didst return alone at evening," said the Jewish maiden named Martha, restraining her tears.

"To-day I shall not return without my son; to-day he will come to his mother," replied the wife of Joseph the carpenter, with radiant face.

The fair youth cried :

"What will the Master say if he meets thee in the burning, dusty highway, without him to whom he said, on the cross: 'Behold thy mother!'"

But the mother of the Galilean insisted :

"I would be alone when I meet my son who is risen from the dead."

Thus she parted from John and the women, who stood in the road and gazed after the departing one as long as she could be seen.

*

All alone, the mother continued her way upon the road by which her son must come that day. She thought not of those whom she had left behind : all happiness and all hope on earth lay before her.

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The highway was still deserted. A golden morning light, tinged with rosy clouds, rested over the broad plain, which was strewn with gay flowers. With the first sunbeams the many-colored blossoms began to sparkle and to glisten as if jewels were springing up roundabout.

Amid all this spring-beauty the mother wandered on. Great azure butterflies sported around her in throngs, so that she walked along as in a shining, softly drifting cloud. Birds with gay plumage hovered at her side. Their jubilant song filled the air.

And as she wandered she thought :

They had called her the most sorrowful of mothers—aye, he was indeed a son of sorrow to her! Even as a lad he had turned from her to those who were weary and heavy-laden. The poor and the lowly became his brethren and sisters; suffering, sorrowing, suppressed, and unhappy humanity became his mother.

She who had borne him was forced to stand aside from his heart.

But she did not complain.

Not for herself had she borne this son. She, his mother, had been his first disciple. Who

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should have believed in him if not she who had given the Son of Man to humanity?

No! She should not be called the most sorrowful of mothers, but the happiest.

It was meet that he should suffer and die the death of the malefactor on the cross. Every stroke that scourged his body fell upon her heart; every sigh which he breathed on the cross became a death-cry for her soul. But he suffered and died to redeem a world of sufferers.

Even when Pilate had crowned him with thorns and shown him to the people, scourged until he bled—even when he died on the cross—she had yet been, in spite of her grief, a happy mother.

They had buried him, and, as it was said, he was risen from the dead. She did not reflect whether the miracle were possible—she believed in it! They had told her that he was in Galilee. Every day she had gone out and had followed the road by which he must needs come; for he would come! He would approach her and say:

“Mother!”

And she would answer:

“My son!”

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So she was going to meet this son.

He had not come yesterday: to-day he would come—he must come to-day!

*

Country-people, travellers on horseback and in chariots, met the mother.

She had been told that not even his disciples had recognized the risen Master, who had passed through the darkness and terror of death into life eternal—but surely her eyes would know her son again, even though he had returned to earth in a new body.

She looked upon all those whom she met. She looked only upon their hands—by his hands alone she would know him.

But among the many who passed by her, there was not one who had hands which could be stretched out to heal and to succor, to bless and to save all those who came to him weary and heavy-laden.

The day grew intensely hot. A cloudless, steel-blue sky was stretched above the earth.

Onward and onward went the mother. As she had assured the disciple who was to be her son, she felt neither weariness nor thirst, neither the dust of the highway nor the burn-

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ing rays of the sun. She felt naught but her yearning and the certainty : "He is coming to-day—he must come to-day!"

No one dared speak to her. Her mother-yearning rested upon her beautiful, calm face like a radiance that was not of this world. All evaded the shining one, stood still, looked after her, and whispered to each other :

"That is another of those ecstatic women that follow the Galilean!"

Noon came, and the mother still went on. Evening came, and she still wandered! This day she would not stop, she would not turn! For :

This day he would surely come—this day he must come !

A blood-red sunset glow lit up the plain as the mother reached a height. For a long distance she could follow the road, which lost itself in the rosy mist of the twilight.

She was entirely alone.

For one moment the mother rested. For one moment it seemed as if she must heave a sigh from the depths of her soul, sorrowfully, weary unto death.

But she went on again, with the undiminished radiance of hope in her eyes. For :

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Even this day she would fold her son in her arms!

With this unshakable belief the mother went onward into the gathering night, which enfolded her like a pinion from heaven.

CHAPTER XIX

SINCE Velosianus had left Caprea on an imperial vessel, his longing for the unknown God had grown beyond all bounds. He was conscious that it was not he alone who was filled, to the depths of his soul, with this mighty longing for a new, supernatural power, which ordains and fulfils the fate of man; he had discovered that feeling in the bosom of all mankind; all mankind, in their misery and their weakness, were no longer content to pray to unreal images of marble, bronze, or ivory, but would fain appeal to a living spirit and law.

Even the "Ruler of the World," the august Emperor and divine Cæsar—even the terrible Tiberius, who despised men and gods, cried in his innermost soul for an incomprehensible miraculous power, which would release him from the torments of his human divinity, his Cæsarian madness.

The world of the old gods was crumbling to

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dust. From its ashes a new one must needs rise, or the soul of humanity were undone.

*

When, after a marvellously quick and favorable voyage, Velosianus reached Jerusalem; when he found the whole city, the whole country, full of the occurrence which had just taken place; when he recognized the visions of the sleep-walking maiden as truths, he was seized with a storm of emotions, which he must needs allay before, in the face of these astounding facts, he proceeded to action.

For the beginning he made himself familiar with persons and circumstances, and, as one who desired to seek the risen Master, gained an entrance into the circle of those who had already found the Messiah.

But these were chiefly persons of an entirely different kind from what Velosianus had pictured to himself in the followers of the great miracle-worker. Nearly all of them were full of fear and anxiety, did not venture to confess their Lord and Master boldly and publicly, and trembled before Jews and Romans. Nearly all manifested a surprising confusion and ignorance concerning both the person of the Messiah and his doctrine. Almost all merely followed

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a dim impulse of their spirits, which drove them irresistibly towards a power that promised them, as a reward for brief, heavy, earthly sorrow, the eternal joys of heaven.

With all this great ignorance and want of clearness, these wide contradictions and this hopeless confusion, the general darkness of conception was illumined, as by a guiding star, by the universal longing of the human race for another, better existence after death.

One circumstance which gave Velosianus much food for thought was that in the whole of the body of the disciples there was hardly one who was happy or healthy; the whole community consisted of cripples and those sick in body or in mind; of those who were sorrowing and in need of consolation. Velosianus met, among these Nazarenes, only such as were without hope in the world, as knew no joy and no laughter. One Jewish maiden alone, named Martha, a sister of the Lazarus whom the Master had raised from the dead, manifested a brave and cheerful spirit, on account of which she was looked upon unfavorably by all her fellow-disciples, as one who was not worthy of being a follower of the Saviour.

The Saviour! To none whom the Galilean

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could not save from earthly ills had he revealed himself as a God.

Velosianus sought out those who had seen and spoken with the risen Lord, the places where he appeared to them. But even now, after so short a time, he could learn nothing certain; even now, he was met at every step by contradictory and vague reports, so that he could not distinguish delusion from truth.

Some of those who had seen the transfigured Master were in a constant state of highest ecstasy, in which they incessantly heard heavenly voices and saw unearthly visions, while others, as it were, had been mentally paralyzed by the wonderful, incomprehensible things which they had witnessed.

"What is truth?" cried Velosianus to himself, even after a few days—even as Pontius Pilate had cried it before all the people.

*

The deepest impression which the ambassador of the Emperor received was made upon him by Mary of Magdala. Together with the beautiful Claudia Procula, whose deep longing had thrown her into a holy frenzy, she proclaimed the gospel of the Son of Man. Since

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the deception regarding the discovered dead body had been made public, the great sinner of old had undergone a new change. She felt, as it were, overwhelmed with sin, that she, whom the risen Master had deemed worthy of beholding him before all others, could have doubted him for a moment and believed in the authenticity of the body exhibited. She was filled with a passionate desire to atone for this sin. With a pale face, a feverish fire in her glorious eyes, her garments rent, enveloped from head to foot in her flowing, flaming hair, she wandered about Jerusalem at the side of the fanatic Roman. Early and late she passed along the streets, entered the houses of Romans and Jews, took up her position in front of the temples and in the Forum, wandered about the country around the city of Zion, and, with burning words, called upon the unbelieving to follow the Messiah. Together with her companion, she was jeered at, insulted, and driven away with stones. The scum of the streets ran after her and derided her. Every mocking word was answered by the ecstatic woman with a smile. And when a stone struck her, so that she bled, she manifested as much joy as if she had been decked with

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fragrant flowers and anointed with precious spikenard.

When Velosianus proposed to her that she should go with him to seek the risen Master, she replied :

“I have found my dear Lord ! He lives in my soul, and bids me proclaim him, and, in proclaiming him, die, so that I may share his celestial glory.”

CHAPTER XX

Soon after his arrival at Jerusalem, Velosianus sent the Hebrew maiden, whose visions had brought him across the sea, back to her parents. Since she had reported on Caprea, before the Cæsar, the last and highest miracle of the Galilean—his resurrection from the dead—the gift of prophecy had apparently left the child, and given place to a condition of constant, deep exhaustion, both of body and of soul. In vain the ambassador of the Emperor attempted to rouse the miraculous power in her again, in order to learn, by its help, where the risen Saviour might be found. Her visions were so indistinct, her reports, given under evident bodily suffering, so incoherent, that Velosianus ceased his fruitless endeavors.

The daughter of Jairus was confided to the young captain of Prætorians who had conducted Velosianus to the Cæsar on Caprea, and, by order of the Emperor, had followed

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him to Jerusalem. His name was Mucius Mamilius, and his place of birth the ancient city of Tusculum, in the lovely Albanian mountains near Rome, in which Elysian region Tiberius had a magnificent country-seat.

Even during the voyage the maiden of Nazareth had been the object of secret care on the part of the young Tusculan.

As a true Roman, and, moreover, sprung from one of the oldest and noblest Latin families—the Mamilii had been allied by marriage to Roman kings—Mucius despised the Hebrews—a subjugated people, and in repute of being unclean—with the passionate vehemence of youth; the mere vicinity of a Jew seemed degrading to the proud captain of the imperial body-guard! Then he saw, on Caprea, the Jewish maiden, and heard her prophesy. Her face deathly pale, with wide-open, staring eyes, she moved onward as if with bound feet, beneath the blossoming trees of the smiling island, murmuring incomprehensible words. And he was told: “This strange creature was dead, and about to be buried. But she was recalled to life by a miracle-worker.” “Recalled to life!” thought the youth, himself so full of life and vigor, and he was seized with a deep, shudder-

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ing pity for this creature, who had been called back from the night of death to the radiance of day. At the same time with this painful sensation there sprang up in his breast a repugnance to yon despotic man, who set aside the laws of nature, and reanimated, in so terrible a way, a countenance upon which the divine peace of non-existence had already rested.

His hatred of the great Galilean grew when he was commanded to accompany the king of priests and the Hebrew maiden on their search for the new God.

Why seek a God? What manner of God was he who suffered himself to be sought? The face of the Jewess showed only too plainly the character of this God, who would have all creatures pale, wretched, full of sorrow; who hated life, hated the laughing, sparkling, happy life of youth, hope, and love. And, moreover—how could a Jew be a God?

Mucius continued to struggle with his pity for her who had been raised from the dead, and his defiant soul groaned as if in chains when he felt himself conquered by this pity. At night he would rise secretly, in order to spread a soft mat for the Hebrew maiden in

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some sheltered spot on deck; and by day the power of his sympathy would draw him into the contaminating neighborhood of the daughter of Judah.

In the mean time, a new miracle had been wrought in the maiden. Her youth, which had been as if paralyzed, began to awaken from its deathlike sleep. But with this second resurrection the miraculous power of second-sight departed from the Jewess. Velosianus observed this change with surprise; Mucius with amazement. Only the new friend of the Cæsar, however, observed, with a faint smile, that on this occasion another divinity was exercising its power over the daughter of Jairus, a divinity whose temple was the human heart.

With each day which the sick maiden passed in the vicinity of the young captain, she recovered her health more and more. To her face, the pallor and immobility of which had seemed not of this world, the loveliest bloom of youth returned by degrees. Her eyes beamed with a mild light, and when, one evening, after she had been lying all day in the sweet languor of convalescence on her soft bed of mats, Mucius reluctantly approached her,

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and offered her, in a graceful dish, some choice fruit—it happened for the first time that she smiled on him in the most charming manner.

When Mucius saw her smile, he silently thanked all the gods. For now the spell which caused his pity would be broken—one who smiled had no need of pity, was not worth it. He was about to draw a breath of relief, as if he himself had recovered from a long illness, but, to his indignant surprise, he was forced to recognize that he was still under the curse of a passionate sympathy for the young Jewess; for since he had seen this mysterious, lovely child smile so sweetly, he felt himself even more subject to a dark power.

The commission with which Velosianus had intrusted him after their arrival in Jerusalem—to accompany the Jewess on her journey to Nazareth—seemed but little honorable to the young warrior. He would fain have rebelled against it, and yet—silently obeyed the order. He bought for the Jewess an elderly Syrian slave and a she-ass, and for himself a strong horse. With a small retinue of Roman soldiers he started on the journey with his charge.

In order to avoid constantly looking into her sweet face, or watching whether she would

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cast a timid glance at him, or smile on him once more, or blush beneath his gaze, the young captain, who was struggling in the bonds of the god of love, forced himself to ride proudly at the head of the train, and leave the care of the daughter of the Jewish priest to the slave. For a short time he bore this abstinence very bravely. But the day was so radiant, the spring of the Orient revealed itself to the traveller as so marvellous a miracle of blossoms, the valorous warrior, who was at the same time a youth in love, felt so exuberantly rich, that he must needs lavish some of his treasures on another. It was not long, therefore, before the noble knight turned his fiery steed, caused it, with much art, to rear several times, and suddenly let it trot gently by the side of the gentle she-ass.

But as the Roman could say only a few broken Hebrew words, the mute world-language of love had to suffice for the young couple. To their own astonishment, the two discovered that words are something quite superfluous, as there was a possibility of looking at one another furtively and sighing in secret. But all the furtive glances and secret sighs did not prevent the noble captain from taking a truly

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Roman view of the matter, and feeling that it was, after all, his right as a master to consider this charming daughter of a conquered and despised race his exclusive property. Why should he not take the lovely maid, turn about with her, and send the worthy Jairus, instead of his darling child—which the parents must have given up as lost long ago—a bag of gold by a trusty messenger? What was there that a Roman could not buy from a Jew? Everything, except his God, Jehovah! And even his God! For had not a Jew sold the Messiah to the Jews? Old Jairus would receive the gold, and young Mucius the lovely merchandise, and even Velosianus, strict as he was, must needs pronounce the exchange a fair one. Moreover, it was the only way in which the enamoured Roman could secure possession of the beautiful Jewess.

Unless a miracle should be wrought—perchance by the Galilean. As if the ever-old, ever-new marvel of love had not been miracle enough!

When the sun became too hot, a halt was made under a huge cork-tree. The latter stood at a short distance from the dusty highway, rising up dark and solitary from the plain,

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which was a sea of many-colored blossoms. It stretched away, as far as the eye could reach, with a soft, billowy motion caused by the burning noon breeze. In the gleaming mid-day vapor there arose in the distance, as if enveloped in luminous mist, a rocky range of mountains, the shore of this wondrously beautiful ocean of anemones, narcissuses, and lilies.

The soldiers bought from a shepherd a fat kid, which, stuffed with wild sage and rosemary, was spitted on a twig of laurel and roasted over a fire. The daughter of Jairus would only partake of fresh dates, and sip of a refreshing acid juice which the captain had bought in Jerusalem expressly for his tender charge, and carried with him in a dainty jar. After a comfortable meal the men rested in the shadow of the great tree, which sheltered the weary travellers from the rays of the burning mid-day sun.

In the solemn silence of the hour of rest of the great Pan, young Mucius' eyelids drooped. Lovely visions hovered around him in the shape and with the features of the sweet Hebrew maiden. But they dissolved into gleaming mist, at which the proud Tusculan was so startled that he awoke with a low cry.

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Then he saw the charming original of the vision plucking flowers near him in the glaring sunshine. Now that he had the lovely object of his dream before him in such reality and so palpably near, he remained perfectly quiet, looked contentedly into the bright light with blinking, sleepy eyes, and calmly watched the slight young form stooping and bending among the flowers. Suddenly he sprang up and ran out upon the meadow with uncovered head. And then a strange thing happened: inasmuch as the proud captain of the Emperor's imperial guard helped a little Jewish maiden pluck narcissuses and lilies.

Had there remained in the once dead soul of the maiden even one breath which had not regained life and youth, the awakening of the spirit of the daughter of Jairus would have been completed now, as she was gathering flowers in the Galilean wilderness with him whom she loved! Singing and jubilant, her slight, delicate form hovered about amid the blossoms of the plain, and when Mucius attempted to capture the radiant creature, the brave warrior received such a volley of flowers in his face that all the colors of the rainbow seemed to be dancing before his eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

VELOSIANUS and Pontius Pilate sought the risen Galilean each for himself and each in his own way.

Velosianus, the former servant of the great and eternal gods, who had banished the belief in these celestial powers from his soul as a wanderer shakes the dust from his feet before the door of him who has shown him hospitality, and who, as time went on, was forced to recognize that man needs a God, no less than he needs water—Velosianus sought the new God, who had not yet been revealed to him, as a last shield and salvation for mankind as well as for himself.

In all the places where the Messiah had shown himself to his disciples, Velosianus searched for him. But he did not find him. He wandered through the beautiful gardenlands around the Lake of Tiberias—but found him not. He climbed the shining rocky heights

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of Galilee—but found him not. He went into the brown, burning desert—but found him not. In Bethlehem, where the Son of God had been born of a woman; in Nazareth, where the great miracle-worker had loved to abide; in all the places where Jesus had raised the dead, healed the lame and the blind, cast out devils, comforted those that mourned, preached the Gospel to the widows and the fatherless—everywhere, everywhere did Velosianus seek, but nowhere, nowhere did he find!

His passionate longing gave way to a torturing fear that he would never find this God, that, after all, there was no God to find.

He sought the risen Lord among the rich and the mighty; he sought him among the priests and the scribes, among the pharisees and doctors. He sought him in every shape, and he sought ever and ever in vain!

From Pontius Pilate he heard that he, too, had not found him that was risen from the dead. And Pontius Pilate, in his fear of the wrath of the divine Cæsar, sought as if the preservation of his life depended upon his finding.

In the mean time it was rumored incessantly that the Galilean had appeared to one or an-

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other of his disciples, or had spoken to some woman among his followers.

“What is truth?”

This was the cry which now resounded without ceasing in the soul of Velosianus as well.

*

For thirty days the ambassador of the Emperor had sought indefatigably. He began to grow weary and hopeless.

One day he wandered away from his companions, and went astray. He found himself entirely alone in the majestic solitude of a brown, treeless, rocky region. Nothing living was around him. In the solemn silence Velosianus moved along as if he were the last man.

Suddenly he threw himself upon the ground, pressed his face to the sharp rocks, and cried in his soul: “Lord, let me find thee; for without a God I can no longer be a man!”

He lay motionless, let the sun shine down upon him, and felt not its scorching rays; his yearning for the unknown God was a thousand-fold more burning.

As he lay there in his despair and exhaustion, he seemed to hear a voice speaking to him, saying that he would even to-day find and see the God whom he was seeking. He

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arose, filled with a wondrous confidence and joy. He felt his limbs refreshed, as if, in the burning heat of the desert, he had taken a bath of healing herbs. And he wandered on, taking no note of the way or the direction in which he was going.

"Even to-day thou shalt find the Lord!" Thus a jubilant chorus within him cried to him incessantly. The earth and the heavens seemed to shine with this prophecy.

With every step the lonely wanderer thought to look on the risen Lord. He would spring up from the wild, rocky ground, like a fair, slender blossom. His appearance must be inconceivably glorious.

Yet Velosianus felt neither awe nor fear. A serenity that was not of the earth, a feeling of blissful expectation, took possession of him more and more.

CHAPTER XXII

TOWARDS evening Velosianus descended the mountain by steep goat-paths. Below him a vale appeared, which seemed filled with a faint sunset glow; like a calm flood of rosy clouds it lay at the wanderer's feet. But it proved to be a grove of blooming oleander-trees.

Passing through it, Velosianus thought:

"In no more beautiful spot could the Galilean reveal himself to thee! But, alas! this celestial is a God who would fain transform all the beauty of the earth into gloomy desolation."

And with this reflection the Roman suppressed a sigh.

He walked faster and faster; for the day was declining, and "even to-day" he was to find the Lord.

At last he almost ran.

The lovely wood lost itself in a wide valley

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over which the evening glow spread like a halo. Velosianus felt as if he were approaching his goal, which was the face of the new God—with shining brow. How would that God reveal himself to him? Surely in a glory which would paralyze him who looked upon it. Perchance the yearning of the seeker after God would, on his recognition of a supreme mythical being, culminate in a last releasing sigh.

Nowhere and nowhere did he see the Lord!

Thoroughly exhausted, Velosianus reached a cabin. It was built of clay, and leaned against the trunk of a palm-tree, with the dried leaves of which its roof was covered. Not far from it was a well, with a light stone curb, around which stood several female figures, clad in long white garments. They were drawing water, and talking, while the earth and the sea sank into violet twilight.

The evening was as solemn as if all nature, weary of its existence, were lying down to die.

When the women saw the exhausted wanderer, one of them hastened to meet him, holding out to him her water-jug, from which he drank greedily, and saying:

“Thou art weary, my lord, and behold the

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evening is at hand. Lodge with us this night, for thou wilt find no other roof far around." And she added: "Lowly though our hut be, we will gladly bid thee welcome to it."

Velosianus saw that the woman was poorly clad, and bore in her face the deep traces of a hard life. But her voice and her manner were filled with a calm joy, so that he gladly consented to enter the lowly cabin—though only for a short rest. For as he was even to-day to meet the unknown God, he must needs go on. Between these poor walls of clay, beneath this roof of dried palm-leaves, he would hardly find the new deity.

The woman ran to the hut, and cried, joyfully :

"Veronica! Come out, O Veronica! Here is a countryman of thine, a Roman, who will be our guest."

The women who had been drawing water came from the well, the men of the cabin appeared under the palm-tree, and all showed as much pleasure at the strange, late guest as if a great good-fortune had befallen them.

Velosianus thought :

"What manner of people are these, who welcome a Roman, an enemy of their people,

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to their house like a friend and benefactor, to share their poverty with him?"

Just then the Roman woman, whom her friend had called Veronica, came from the cabin to bid her countryman welcome.

She was a dignified matron, poor like the rest, and exhibiting the same calm, simple serenity. She had a pale, wrinkled face, with eyes that expressed the deepest goodness. When Velosianus asked how she had come to this cabin, so secluded from the world, she replied :

"I am a poor widow, taken in by these good people from charity when I was deserted by the gods and by men. May the Lord bless them for it!"

"The Lord?" cried Velosianus, astonished. "Of what Lord art thou speaking, whose blessing thou dost invoke as if he were a living, eternal God?"

"He *is* the living, eternal God," said Veronica, in a low voice. "O that thou mightest find him!"

Wellnigh had Velosianus cried aloud :

"It is he whom I am seeking! And he has been promised me even to-day!"

*

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In the mean time the women had brought a braided mat from the cabin, and spread it upon the ground under the palm. They approached their guest and invited him to take his rest upon the glistening bast. With a feeling of comfort the weary wanderer stretched himself upon it, and was conscious that, with the balmy air of night, a wondrous peace had come over his restless, yearning soul. The good Veronica appeared, bringing a basin and a jug of water, a linen cloth and an earthen box of ointment. She placed these articles upon the mat, and was about to loosen the sandals of her guest. But the latter protested against such humble service from her aged hands.

Upon this Veronica entreated him, saying:

“In thee, too, the Lord lives! If *thou* refuse my service, suffer me to bathe and anoint my dear Lord’s feet in thee.”

Conquered by the mysterious words “the Lord,” Velosianus permitted that which one of higher station would have allowed without protest. While a violet, starry night sank down upon the great wilderness, the poor widow washed his feet, and anointed them with a balm made of fragrant herbs. This

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done, the other women brought him cakes of maize flour baked between red-hot stones, fresh dates, and golden honeycomb. These gifts of poverty were offered to him with the most sincere pleasure.

While he ate, and drank, the while, of the clear, cool water of the well, the good people stretched themselves around his mat, and told their guest of their life in this desolate region, which was never visited by a stranger, and in which they were forced to defend the few lambs and goats which they possessed against the wild beasts of the wilderness. In simple words they described to their attentive listener a life full of privation, dangers, and suffering.

They told him that, in former years, they had been constantly discontented with their lot, and there had been strife and contention between them. Now all that was changed. Now they had faith and hope, happiness and contentment; now they loved each other, and were long-suffering and forbearing one towards the other.

Velosianus asked how this had come about.

Salvation had come to them in their humble, lonely cabin.

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What salvation?

The great, only, eternal salvation! Old Veronica had brought it to them.

How had Veronica, with the mystery which they called salvation, reached them?

She had been sent to them.

They did not say, however, that they had taken in the Roman woman out of charity. Nor was he asked by any one whence he came, whither he was going, or who he was. It sufficed them that he was their guest and that they could show him kindness.

And surely these simple people would full as gladly have refreshed him, and spread for him the best mat which they possessed, if he had been their enemy and had done evil unto them.

*

Velosianus declared that he would take his rest under the palm-tree in front of the hut, as he must needs go on in the night. All entreated him:

“Tarry with us, Lord! When the day dawns we will seek thy lost companions, bring them hither, and kill for them and thee our best kid.”

But Velosianus explained to them, earnestly,

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that he himself must needs seek, and that this very night. Upon this they left him sadly, in order to await his departure in the cabin, and accompany him on his way for a while.

Velosianus wished to speak with Veronica before leaving. She told him that she would come out to him as soon as she and the others had performed their evening devotions. To the Roman's astonished question, whether the shepherds prayed to the gods of Rome, she replied, mysteriously :

“They serve the Lord with me.”

Velosianus cried :

“Is this Lord, who appears to be your Saviour, the miracle-worker of Nazareth, whom Pontius Pilate caused to be crucified at Jerusalem, and of whom they say that he is risen from the dead ?”

Veronica answered :

“Thou sayest it.”

The God-seeker inquired, excitedly :

“Has he revealed himself unto thee in death? Has he appeared to thee? Where is he?”

“He is with us.”

“In this lowly hut?”

“*Where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them.*”

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With this the Nazarene woman went into the cabin.

Velosianus remained behind in violent agitation.

Could it be that he had already found the Galilean, whom they called the Lord—that he had found the God whom he had been seeking, full of longing, of mortal anguish? Could it be that the risen Master continued to live in the spirit with those who believed in him and bore witness of him? Did none of the faithful need to see him face to face; to ask him: “Lord, is it thou?” Did they not need to thrust their hands in his side, and say: “Yea, Lord, it is thou! Behold, I doubted thee, but now that I have touched thee, now, Lord, I believe in thee!” Could it be that this unheard-of, this incomprehensible resurrection from the dead only meant that he who was crucified and died for the sins and sufferings of all humanity, continued to live in the souls of his followers?

Had this conviction been revealed to him by the new unknown deity—“even to-day,” as his boding soul had foretold to him?

He could rest no longer. All weariness had passed away from his body and from his soul.

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He felt within himself a strength, a confidence, a joy, as if he were a youth, on whom life smiled like a summer's day.

He sprang up and hastened towards the cabin. The door stood wide open, and Velosianus beheld the little flock in whose midst was the Lord.

CHAPTER XXIII

By the pale light of a small lamp, Velosianus beheld the poor people absorbed in adoration, with a fervency as deep as if the divinity had been bodily in their midst. They seemed to be talking to it in a simple-minded, affectionate way, like children who have a great trouble or a sore pain, and confide it to their dear father, with the sure conviction that he will help them. Old Veronica was the spokeswoman.

After those present had poured out their oppressed hearts before the Lord, and had been comforted by him, Veronica went into a chamber, which was partitioned off from the rest of the space by a mat. During her absence none of the others stirred from their places. She returned, bearing in both hands a small folded cloth, at the sight of which the whole assemblage was seized with a violent but totally silent agitation. With gestures of the deepest

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emotion and most fervent love they crowded around the good Veronica, as if she were holding in her lifted hands the salvation of the new faith, the refuge of all who are weary and heavy-laden.

A lovely maiden, still half a child, took the earthen lamp, stepped to Veronica's side, and held the light aloft.

Then Veronica unfolded the cloth.

Spreading it out and holding it up before her, the poor old woman stood there as majestically and solemnly as if she had been a priestess and prophetess.

The little band of worshippers broke out into sighs and sobs, into cries of anguish and stammering words of love.

All cried, with lifted hands:

"Lord! Lord! Lord!"

*

As if drawn by a power which is not of this world, Velosianus moved forward to the open entrance. Here he stood motionless, gazing fixedly at the small white cloth, on which he saw portrayed, in faint, pale outlines, as if it had been breathed upon the linen, an unspeakably mild, unspeakably sorrowful face.

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It was the face of a sufferer.

The lips, upon which words of love and benediction seemed still to be hovering, were opened as if to utter a suppressed moan; the eyes, from which beamed a world of sorrow, a heaven of mercy, looked upon the beholder with a fading light, as if about to become glazed in death. From the pale, thorn-crowned brow the blood flowed down the cheeks.

Velosianus, who, until now, had seen no divine images but such as were luminous with happiness, and radiant with eternal youth, serenity, and beauty, felt as if the whole world around him were falling to ruin. But from the world's ashes, the ruins of temples, the dust of altars and divine images, he saw this pale, sorrow-bowed head rise up, surrounded by a dazzling halo of flames. And he heard, at the same time, a mild voice saying:

"I am the salvation, and the consolation, and the redemption! But ye must take up your cross and follow me."

Then Velosianus, too, recognized this God. On the threshold of the lowly cabin he fell upon his knees, stretched both arms towards the face of him who was crucified, and cried from the depths of his soul:

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“Lord! Lord! Lord!”

*

Veronica spent the night under the palm-tree, in conversation with the new Nazarene, who had at last found the God whom he was seeking. She told him how she had been led to the Lord and to the lonely hut on the borders of the desert.

“I am a freedwoman, and belonged to the household of Pontius Pilate. I dwelt in Jerusalem, had a husband who honored me, had blooming sons and daughters, who were my pride and my happiness.

“I served the gods in humility, praised them as the creators and preservers of the joy of my life, and offered sacrifices to them and to the Lares of our house.

“Then Fate crossed my path.

“Spies of the Emperor saw my youngest and loveliest daughter, and demanded her for the Emperor. And when their demand was refused, they took her by force. In vain did we crave mercy of the governor—he did not even give us justice! They were about to bear the maiden away, when one of her brothers threw himself upon the captain and killed him.

“He was seized, taken before the governor,

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and condemned to death. My daughter was borne away by the hirelings of the Emperor. They told me that, in the end, she was thrown from the rocks of Caprea into the sea.

“My loveliest daughter dishonored and dead, my noblest son condemned as a malefactor—and the great eternal gods had suffered these monstrous things to befall those who were utterly innocent!

“They permitted even more sorrow to come upon us.

“My husband became melancholy-mad, and thrust himself upon his sword; my second son was forced to go to war in the Cæsar’s service, and did not return. Of my whole wealth all that was left me was one daughter and a boy, who was born when his father died by his own hand.

“When my dearest son had killed the captain, all our goods were confiscated. We were quite poor. I earned a small pittance for my children by carrying water. But my daughter was not the true child of her parents; she was not content to suffer want or to be in need. She was beautiful, and one day she sold her beauty to him who bid the most for it. Thus this child, too, was dead to me!

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"Now only my babe was left; I cried to the gods for him, but they did not hear me.

"Weakened by suffering and with labor, I could suckle my child only with my tears and with my heart's blood. Thus I was forced to yield up this last treasure. Now I had nothing left which the gods could have taken from me—now I was alone.

"I lived on charity, as I could no longer work. But I begged only when I became too hungry.

"By day and by night I cried to the gods: 'Wherefore? What have I done to you? Wherefore?'

"They gave me no answer.

"Faint with hunger, sick, no hope, no faith in my soul, I was one day stealing through the streets of Jerusalem. I no longer thought or felt anything. Suddenly I met a crowd, screaming, jeering, shouting. To escape being thrown to the ground and trampled upon, I pressed myself against the wall of a house. But the rushing, living stream seized me, and bore me to a spot where a suffering man was lying upon the ground.

"It was a malefactor condemned to death. Thorns were twined around his brow, and the

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cross upon which he was to die had been bound upon his back. He had broken down under its weight. Surrounded by the howling populace, he lay helpless. His face was covered with sweat. His gaze craved compassion, his lips suppressed a moan.

“I looked upon him, and I pitied the man, who perchance was a great malefactor, beneath the weight of his cross, as I had once pitied my own dear son, when, for his sister’s sake, he was forced to go the same way, surrounded by a furious, shouting crowd.

“My compassion for the condemned man moved me so deeply that it brought back to me all my own wretched life. But I felt: ‘This man is suffering more at this moment than thou hast ever suffered.’

“If I could only show him some kindness! One dew-drop of good in the boundless sea of his suffering!

“I saw the sweat upon his brow, and the desire seized me at least to wipe it off.

“I seized my kerchief, bent over him, and pressed the cool linen to his face.

“When I drew the kerchief away, he looked upon me.

“Like balm his gaze penetrated my wounded

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soul. It revived beneath his look, freed itself from the world, and mounted to heavenly heights.

“Soon the poor man was dragged to his feet by the hands of the soldiers and driven on with blows and sword-strokes.

“I followed him. I saw how they crucified him at Golgotha: I saw his death-struggle. I heard him forgive his enemies, and breathe his last sigh.

“I recognized the God, who died on the cross for our sins and sufferings.

“The kerchief with which I had wiped his brow I had folded and laid upon my aching heart.

“When night came, I left the place of execution. I wandered on the whole night long. When I began to grow weary, I thought of the face from which I had wiped the sweat with my kerchief, and went on with renewed strength.

“At the beginning of the third night I reached this cabin, the inmates of which took me in and washed my sore feet with water from the well.

“Lord, think what I felt when I saw that the kerchief which had lain upon my bosom had

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been imprinted with the face that I had borne in my heart from the moment in which I wiped its sweat with my poor linen cloth!

“A miracle! A miracle”

*

Thus the yearning of the former king of priests after the new God was stilled. Velosianus sought no longer. For three days he remained in the hut under the palm-tree with the Nazarenes, and learned to know the Lord. When he was not holding conversation with Veronica, he would stroll about alone in the oleander-grove on the border of the wilderness.

Or he would wander far out into the brown desert, or rest on the curb of the well. And wherever he went, wherever he rested, he felt the presence of the Risen One in his soul.

At last, however, he was seized with a mighty impulse to go out into the world and proclaim the God whom he had found.

First of all to the Emperor, sick of Cæsarean madness.

He told Veronica of his great purpose, and asked if she would accompany him across the sea to Caprea, with the cloth bearing the divine image.

For Tiberius *must* see that kerchief! It

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would work a miracle on him, too, and heal him, body and soul. That image would speak to him with tongues of angels.

Deeply moved by the sublime task of appearing before the Ruler of the World with her kerchief, and preaching the gospel to him, Veronica consented.

When the worthy inmates of the cabin heard that Veronica was about to leave them, and, moreover, bear away with her the divine image, they broke out in loud lamentation. But when the mission was explained to them which their friend would fill, they were silent, and recognized the working of Providence. The women deftly braided, of palm-leaves dried in the sun, a small shrine, filled it with the most fragrant herbs of the plain, and laid the cloth within it, after each one of them had reverently pressed her lips to its border. But even when the image had been taken from the cabin, it seemed as if it still filled the lowly space with a divine breath.

In the night, as the evening star was fading, Velosianus and Veronica took their departure. Veronica bore the shrine, and walked with a transfigured face. The inmates of the hut accompanied the God and the two who were to

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proclaim him for some distance through the desert.

Then they bade them a sorrowful farewell.

The two wandered on and on. They walked along the burning highway under a scorching sky. But it seemed to them as if they were treading on blooming flowers—the world was without pain for those who bore the God within themselves.

Velosianus could no longer conceive how he could ever have wished for a godless world, or believed in the possibility of such a one.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON the way, Velosianus met with a pleasant adventure.

He, with Veronica, arrived at a small, cheerful town, situated on the Lake of Galilee, in the midst of palm-groves, orchards, and blooming thickets. In this happy spot it was evident that a festival was taking place, in which every one joined ; for young and old, rich and poor, were making holiday and rejoicing.

The houses were decked with gay carpets and garlands, the streets strewn with yellow sand and flowers. The inhabitants had donned their holiday attire, the youths and maidens wore wreaths upon their heads, and singing and the sounds of the lute were heard on every side.

Velosianus asked a group of merry lads the cause of this general festive joy, and was told that the loveliest maiden of the town was celebrating her marriage on this day. The lads offered to escort him to the house of the bride,

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where even the greatest stranger would, on this occasion, be an honored and welcome guest.

The Roman thanked the courteous youths, and, with Veronica, passed on his way, which led them past the festive house.

Facing the street there was a handsome open portico, before which was assembled a crowd of joyfully excited people of the town. Its white columns were thickly wound round with branches of blooming pomegranate, garlands of yellow jasmine hung from arch to arch, and the rose-gardens of the town seemed to have been robbed of all their wealth in order to inundate the house of the happy bride with beauty and fragrance.

In the portico the table was spread for the bridal couple, their kindred, and the most honored guests, while a great number of those invited were furnished with food and drink in the street, which had been transformed into a long festive hall.

Room was readily made for the two strangers. They walked along so solemnly, and their faces wore so exalted an expression, that the sight of them caused silence and astonishment, and every eye was turned upon them.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by a loud

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cry of joy, and a man ran hastily from the house to the street, and towards Velosianus, who recognized in him the young captain of the imperial guard, his noble face irradiated by a happiness that seemed not of this world. Mucius had doffed his warlike attire, was clad in a white robe, and wore on his head a thick wreath of dark-red roses.

“What art thou doing in this festive house?”

“I am celebrating.”

“Didst thou return the daughter of Jairus to her parents?”

“Behold her yonder!”

And he pointed to the lovely maiden, who, enveloped in her bridal veil, reclined upon the flower-strewn cushions. But the place beside her was vacant.

Then only it occurred to Velosianus that he was in the city of his Lord and Master, whose image Veronica was bearing.

He looked full into the radiant face of Mucius, was silent a while, and then said, slowly, in a low voice :

“How came it about, my son Mucius, that thou, a Roman, and a believer in the gods, didst wed this Jewish maiden, whom Christ, our Saviour, raised from the dead?”

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In deep emotion the youth replied :

“He raised me, too, from a spiritual death ! Thou shalt hear the miracle which he wrought upon me, before the sun sets. Now come with me to my kindred, and suffer us to honor and love thee.”

Velosianus reminded him :

“What will the Emperor say ? Thou didst become faithless to him in Galilee. His wrath will crush thee, for he is thy master.”

“My only Master henceforth is called Jesus of Nazareth. It is he whom I serve ; he will dispose of me. Come with me now, dear father, to my bride.”

*

Veronica had placed the glistening shrine which contained the image of the Saviour of the world before the happy couple among the roses of the festive board, and at once it seemed as if the Lord were bodily in the midst of the guests.

They spoke of him as if the Risen One must needs answer them. All listened, if perchance they might hear his voice. They felt his presence, and were filled with an unspeakably pure and peaceful gladness.

As the day was drawing to an end, Mucius

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rose, beckoned to Velosianus, and led him out to a secluded spot under lofty, blooming pomegranate-trees.

Here he related the miracle of his conversion. The nearer the young Roman had drawn to the paternal house of the lovely Hebrew maiden, the more intense had grown his passion. He had lost all control of himself, and resolved to obtain possession of his charge by force. His intention was to abduct her, and to live with her somewhere in secret.

At the last resting-place he had succeeded in separating the maiden from her female companion, and enticing her to a distant field of asphodels.

All around the two there was deep solitude. Before them lay a wide field, thickly overgrown with the beautiful flowers, the tall, light stalks of which rose high and slender above their blue-green foliage.

Suddenly, as he looked up, he was no longer alone with the maiden among the asphodels; a third person was walking a short distance in front of them.

It was a form the white garment of which shed a radiance more luminous than the bright sunshine which flooded the flowery plain with

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sparkling light. It moved slowly along, without evading any of the flower-bushes, of almost a man's height, which stood in its way; on the contrary, they seemed to bow to it in humility.

It was singular, too, that only Mucius saw the stranger, and not the Jewess.

A fierce rage came over him, a wild hatred of this third one, whose radiant presence frustrated his wicked plan.

When he stopped, the other, too, stayed his steps, and then stood among the asphodels like a radiant statue.

At last Mucius could bear it no longer. He hastened towards the mysterious vision; he was about to call it to account, to drive it away. Strange! However, he hastened his steps, the shining one remained constantly before him. At last Mucius ran. His heart beat violently, there was a blood-red light before his eyes. "If I reach him I will strike him down!" he said to himself.

He had hardly taken this resolve when he saw the wondrous stranger stop, as if to await him. But he did not turn, so that Mucius would have been forced to attack him from behind.

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Now the Roman had reached him, drew his sword, lifted it, and cried :

“Turn, or I will strike thee down from behind !”

But the other did not move.

Then Mucius was about to attack him, but he could not do so.

Three times he attempted to strike the fatal blow, and three times he found it impossible to lift his arm and sword.

Then the young warrior, who knew no fear, was seized with a chill of horror. He turned pale, and trembled. A strong desire flashed through him to turn the point of his sword against his own breast, as if he were one vanquished, a coward, and a fugitive, who was no longer worthy of drawing breath.

This time his arm obeyed his will, and he was about to throw himself upon his sword in despair when the stranger turned towards him, and looked at him with eyes that were filled with deepest sorrow and, at the same time, heavenly mercy.

At this Mucius cried aloud :

“Thou art the Lord ! Thou must be the Lord ! The risen, the only God, whom we are seeking ! Lord, Lord, Lord, forgive me my sin !”

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And the Lord smiled on Mucius lovingly and forgivingly. The youth fell upon his knees, and would have embraced the form of light.

But it vanished in a misty vapor.

Thus the Lord had revealed himself to the young Roman in the field of asphodels. Mucius returned to the maiden, conducted her to her parents, to whom it seemed as if a second miracle had been wrought, told the father of the change which had come over him, and asked for the hand of the Jewess in marriage; no longer a worshipper of the gods, but an enthusiastic believer in the crucified Messiah.

*

Before nightfall the image-bearers went on their way; but not without having opened for the newly wed couple and their kindred the woven shrine, from which the thorn-crowned head of the Saviour shone out in the most sublime suffering and the highest unearthly beauty upon those assembled, transforming the jubilant house of marriage into a sobbing house of prayer.

When the day dawned the two were met by a train of Nazarenes, among whom were the disciples of the Lord. With gestures and

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words of the highest rapture they described how the risen Saviour had been lifted from the earth before their rapt eyes, and had ascended to heaven, which had opened to him its radiant eternity.

Velosianus and Veronica, too, were seized by the general transport. In the open field, under the luminous heavens which had received the transfigured Lord, Veronica unveiled the most sacred of images. All thronged towards it with out-stretched arms, as if they would have graven the beloved features on their souls. With the jubilant chorus of countless larks were mingled the broken, faltering ejaculations of the rapt Galileans.

The disciples accompanied the two as far as the gates of Jerusalem.

Then they bade them farewell. Each one of them went his way, which led him out into the world to preach the gospel to every creature.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Velosianus, with Veronica and the divine image, reached Jerusalem, he learned that Pontius Pilate, not having found the Galilean, had left the city of Zion and taken ship to Caprea, there to justify before the Emperor his crucifixion of the pretended God.

Velosianus, too, with his retinue, prepared for a speedy departure.

The evening before he was to leave, he was told that a Galilean woman of extraordinary beauty was crouching before the door of his palace, and would not be turned away; that she seemed bereft of reason.

Velosianus commanded that the woman be brought before him, and at once, by her flaming locks, recognized Mary Magdalene.

"I would have thee take me with thee to the Cæsar."

"What wouldst thou of the Cæsar, O Mary?"

"I would preach the gospel to the Cæsar."

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“Dost thou not know that I am bearing the Lord to Tiberius?”

And he told her how he had found Veronica and the image of the risen Lord.

But Mary insisted upon the fulfilment of her desire.

“All that is not enough! We must testify to the Lord. We must suffer ourselves to be racked and tortured, to be crucified for him. In throngs and throngs we must be nailed to the cross, we who believe in the Lord. It is not enough that his divine blood has been shed—that of thousands and thousands of his followers must likewise flow. Only when from his wounds a sea of blood and tears has poured will his cross rise again triumphantly from the red flood: a rock which nothing will break and nothing will shatter.”

She spoke like a prophetess.

Velosianus shuddered. He closed his eyes, he seemed to behold a vision, and he heard a sad, despairing voice, saying:

“I am the sorrow and the suffering, the renunciation and the life without happiness on earth. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

And as he opened his eyes, still shuddering,

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they looked into those of the wildly ecstatic Galilean woman. Mary Magdalene went on:

"I have loved him as never an earthly woman loved a divine man. My mighty love for him washed me clean from all sin, which would also have been love, but the love of the flesh and of sin. He recognized my passion, which was of this world, yet he did not condemn me, but forgave me. He suffered me to stand beneath the cross when he died, with his mother and the disciple whom he loved. I received his last dying look. I helped lay his body in the tomb. I was the first to whom the angel announced that he had risen from the dead. I was the first to whom he appeared, to whom he spoke. Hence I must be the first who suffers and dies for him. Therefore, take me with thee to the Cæsar!"

Velosianus hesitated. But she cried again and again:

"Take me with thee! Take me with thee!"

Then he granted her request.

Velosianus, Veronica, and Mary Magdalene journeyed to Italy. Before they took ship, they learned that the Cæsarian sickness of Tiberius had reached the highest point. Messengers after messengers had been sent out to seek

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Velosianus; they informed him that the Emperor's only hope of relief was in the crucified and risen Galilean; that Velosianus would be doomed to death if he returned without the great miracle-worker; that the Imperator no longer had sacrifices offered to the gods, but to the one unknown God alone, and that he sat for whole days and nights before his Villa of Jupiter, gazing fixedly out to sea, hoping that he whom he expected, he whom he longed for, would come at last.

He was on the way!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE Emperor's contempt for the gods, who permitted and calmly endured everything, had increased immeasurably. In their Hellenic glory of gold and bronze, marble and ivory, they stood, helpless, in gleaming porticos, patiently suffering themselves to be disregarded and scoffed at.

Even beauty, that most beatifying of all divinities, Tiberius began to hate. He was seized by an actual frenzy for destroying it wherever he saw it. But he would have been forced to destroy his lovely island, and, indeed, the whole of Italy, even to make a beginning in banishing it from the world.

In order to see as little as possible of the beauties which filled the aged imperial demon with disgust, Tiberius preferred to live chiefly in the night. But as, on Caprea, even the night was full of delights: the sea reflecting the light of the stars and the moon, the rocks

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gleaming like marble, the fragrant gardens filled with blossoms—he felt himself constantly racked and tortured. It afforded him the greatest satisfaction to see the marble bodies of the most beautiful statues broken to pieces before his eyes, and his enervation no longer knew any other delight than the annihilation of the blooming youth of Italy and all the provinces, who were sought out and brought to him in throngs by his myrmidons.

Then, again, he would sit on the highest peak of Caprea. Bent over and shrunk within himself, he would recline on his golden throne-like seat, his aged form wrapped in the majestic folds of his imperial mantle, a blood-red spot in creation! He suffered the summer sun to scorch his uncovered head, the desert wind of Africa to breathe upon him, the storm to rage around him, the darkness to envelop him, and gazed fixedly out in the direction from which the sail must appear on the billows which would bring the great miracle-worker to him.

But not for his sick body, not for his diseased mind, his soul possessed of demons, did the unhappy ruler of the world thirst for a miracle. He would have everything that existed

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shaken and overthrown, destroyed and annihilated, transformed and created anew by it. It was to begin with the old "eternal" gods; it was to end with the whole of mankind, ripe for destruction. Nothing was to remain of all that was worthy to pass away and die.

This power he looked for in the new master, the new tyrant, the new miracle-worker, who subjugated the world in order to chastise it, to torture it, to enslave it, to scourge it to death.

This was the new God, the God of sorrow, of suffering, of renunciation.

When weeks passed, and Velosianus did not return with him who had been crucified and was risen from the dead, the sick Emperor was seized with a feverish unrest. He ordered his great barge to be made ready, and embarked on it. He would suffer no one to accompany him. His retinue and the servants were obliged to conceal themselves; the Cæsar would look upon no human face!

He reclined on deck in the deepest solitude, under hangings of purple and gold. Like a phantom-ship the splendid barge glided over the glistening waters. No skiff was allowed to approach it. The soft, flute-like strains of

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invisible players, the subdued voices of invisible singers mingled with the sad murmur of the waves, which were parted well-nigh inaudibly by the oars of invisible mariners. Hoisted by invisible hands, the purple sails swelled with the wind; placed by invisible hands, there appeared beside the Cæsar's cushion beverages cooled in ice and ripe fruits, the sole nourishment in which Tiberius had indulged for some time.

One single shining strip bordered the coast of the mainland: temples and villas, villas and temples, a splendor and magnificence without comparison, and without end!

At nightfall the imperial barge landed not far from Antium. Here a closed litter was waiting. Slaves who wore bronze masks lifted Tiberius into it, and the train started.

The whole long road from Antium to the Albanian mountains was lined with youths and maidens wearing wreaths upon their heads. They held strongly perfumed burning torches in their uplifted hands, and trembled — lest they should find favor in the Emperor's eyes.

But the Emperor's eyes saw nought but his inward visions. And they were a world of wild, confused images.

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The Cæsar passed along the highway that led to Rome. Since the fall of the false Sejanus—whom Tiberius had loved, in whom he had believed—he had avoided the great mother-city of vice and wickedness, as if golden Rome had been the seat of the plague. For the first time since his self-banishment to Caprea, the Emperor was now to see Rome again.

But suddenly the old disgust came over him. On the Appian Way, shortly before reaching Ariccia, the ancient temple city of Diana, he commanded that the train turn from the road and proceed along the Lake of Albalonga to Tusculum, where the Cæsar possessed a magnificent villa.

As the imperial train reached the beautiful height the sun was just rising. Tiberius drew back the curtains of his litter, and beheld at his feet, bathed in the mild radiance of the young sunlight, the vast Roman land: one single, boundless, incomparable pleasure-ground. And in the midst of this sea of beauty a broad, gleaming mass of houses: Rome, crowned by the imperial palace of the Palatine.

The Emperor looked long upon the land and the city.

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In his gloomy eye there glowed an insatiable, a gigantic hatred, and his soul cried more wildly than ever for the mighty God who was to place upon this Rome, so rich in gods and yet so godless, so supremely sacred and yet so accursed, his crushing foot.

*

Velosianus, with the Galilean miracle-worker, still delayed, and the Emperor's condition grew worse from hour to hour. Not one of his many Hebrew and Egyptian physicians succeeded in procuring for him any alleviation of his sufferings. He banished them all from his presence. His body burned and was racked with pain, as if he were being scourged with flames; that which he had desired for the body of all mankind he now experienced for himself. His soul resembled an unfathomable abyss of furious, raging passions and maddening pain.

His sole demoniacal pleasure was to sit in the portico of his Tusculan villa, stare down on Rome, and picture to himself how the mistress of the world would be vanquished, overthrown, and trampled underfoot by the new divinity.

Every hour an express messenger had to re-

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port whether Velosianus's ship was not yet in sight. But none of them brought an aye. Every messenger who reached Tusculum was seized with mortal fear; and he thanked the gods when the Emperor permitted him to live.

But Tiberius had wearied of having those who brought bad news put to death.

One day the Emperor's condition became insupportable. Racked with pain he wandered about in the halls and porticos of the great palace, and filled its high, vaulted ceilings with sighs, suppressed moans, and loud cursing of the celestials, who were incapable of relieving his sufferings in the slightest degree. His wandering gaze fell upon his realm, upon the temple of the supreme Jupiter, which stood opposite Tusculum on the beautiful wooded Albanian mountain, and then glided downward to a green vale, filled with trees, where lay the grove of the great and chaste goddess Diana, in whose sanctuary Orestes, when pursued by the furies, had hidden the divine image which he had stolen from Tauris.

He, the impious matricide, had been healed and rescued! And was there to be no release from his torments for the almighty ruler of the world?

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For the Galilean came not!

Suddenly Tiberius commanded that notice be given of his coming to the priesthood of Ariccia, and that sacrifices be offered for him in the grove of the great goddess.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE sanctuary of Diana of Ariccia was pervaded by the awe of a terrible mystery, surrounded by the stillness of death.

No horse's hoof was permitted to touch the pavement of the road which led from the Roman plain up to the vast precincts of the temple. This law had been instituted in memory of the beautiful and unfortunate youth Hippolytos, who had been trampled to death by horses on this road.

Impenetrable were the thickets of the sacred grove, which was guarded by the nymphs of the austere goddess. Gigantic ilex-trees stretched up their black trunks from the dark ground, and the gray leaves of their tops crowded towards the sunlight.

Marvellous pale blossoms sprang from the marshy soil, and breathed out a bewildering fragrance in the heavy, sultry air.

In the everlasting twilight, which no sun-

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beam could penetrate, heavy sighs and agonized moans were heard, horrible sounds like death-rattles trembled in the air.

Among the people it was rumored that the goddess of Ariccia demanded living sacrifices.

Neither steers nor lambs were suffered to bleed upon her altars, but the wrath of the ever-chaste, ever-cold divinity required hecatombs of maidens.

From the wild rock there sprang a lonely fountain, the rushing murmur of which resembled the sound of flowing tears. This was Egeria, the faithful nymph, who, after the death of King Numa, had entreated the celestials to change her into running water, so that she might weep evermore for her dead lover.

All the birds, for whom the wildernesses of the grove were too gloomy, assembled in this lovely spot, and accompanied the flowing tears with their sweet song.

Hither, too, fled the nymphs of Diana. They, who were forbidden to feel, who could neither give utterance to their heart's rapture nor weep in despair—they, who knew no pain and no happiness—would lie on the bank of the Fount of Egeria and, pale and mute, gaze

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upon the running, gurgling waters. They were not even permitted to feel longing!

The most awful spot within the precincts of the temple was the abode of the highest of the priests. A divine yet inhuman law appointed him to be the chief servant of Diana of Ariccia, who was the strongest and the most bloody. Every slave who escaped from his master, every murderer who fled from justice, could find a refuge in the temple of the Ariccian goddess. He could attack the chief priest, could struggle with him, or strike him down from behind. If he killed him, he took his place as king of priests in the sanctuary. He retained this position until another fugitive murderer or slave came to the temple, and in his turn killed *him*.

Hence he was forced, while serving the pitiless goddess, to protect his own life. He was forced to protect it hour after hour, by day and by night. Beside the proclaimer of the divinity there lay at all times a drawn sword, whether he were worshipping or sacrificing, whether he were eating and drinking or resting—if the constant fear of death would let him rest.

Most of the high priests of Diana perished

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of exhaustion and weariness of life. Themselves victims of the goddess, they sank down at Diana's altar.

*

Whoever succeeded in penetrating the gloomy thickets and awe-inspiring wildernesses could reach a spot which would cause him to utter a cry of astonishment, of delight.

Suddenly emerging from the gloom of the grove, he would find himself standing on the edge of an extinct crater. The rock fell off in a steep precipice, and the great stone basin formed a circle. Its depths were filled with a blue, calm sheet of water, high above which, on a cliff projecting far into the lake, stood the white, columned house of the goddess.

Here nothing was heard but the voices of the divine mystery, nothing seen but the shining processions of priestesses as, sacrificing and consecrating, they descended from the heights to the border of the lake, which preserved an eternal silence regarding everything which happened on its shores.

Thus it had been for centuries and centuries, until there came to the silent spot one in whose soul lived a demon.

The Emperor Tiberius was pleased to dis-

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turb the peace of the spot, to desecrate the sanctuary.

The Cæsar commanded, and upon the lake there appeared an enchanted island: a thicket of roses, a field covered with blossoms, a luxurious pleasure-house! The master beckoned, and to the sound of lutes and cymbals, the singing of youthful voices, the lovely island moved softly, softly over the placid waters—a floating garden of Semiramis.

Here Tiberius sought peace before he went to Caprea, like a fugitive slave who flies from his master's whip.

But he found no peace.

Now he was returning—pursued by the furies, like Orestes—in order to offer to the goddess, in whom he no longer believed, one last sacrifice; in order to allow himself to be saved by a power which he no longer acknowledged, or to despair of rescue.

For:

The Galilean still delayed!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE train of Pontius Pilate, which was proceeding to Tusculum by forced marches, met that of the Cæsar, who had just left the beautiful mountain-city in order to implore, as a last resort, the aid of Diana of Ariccia.

When the arrival of his representative was made known to the Emperor, he hastily commanded a halt, and ordered Pilate to be brought to his presence at once.

With feverish hands he parted the curtains of his litter, and turned upon the new-comer a look which announced to the latter his fate.

It was merciless.

The procurator stood before Tiberius, who spoke not a word, but continued to stare at him, so that the other felt as if a thousand gleaming swords were turned against him.

The imperial eye drew him by force to the ground, so that he lay in the dust on the basalt-pavement of the road, which was bordered on

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both sides by a gleaming line of splendid tombs and columbaria.

At last the Emperor spoke.

His voice was harsh, hoarse, as if smothered by pain.

And Tiberius, never turning his cruel, implacable eyes from those of the judge of yon Galilean, said :

“Pontius Pilate, where is the man whose divinity thou didst create? I demand him of thee!”

Pilate answered :

“I cannot give him back to thee, O exalted one!”

The Emperor asked, for the second time :

“Pontius Pilate, what hast thou done with that man who would be mightier than all other gods, and than I, the Cæsar?”

“Because he exalted himself even above thee, I caused him to be crucified in thy name, O almighty one!”

“It is rumored that he rose from the dead. Where is he?” inquired Tiberius for the third time, in accents which had no resemblance to sounds from human lips.

Pilate groaned :

“He was a fanatic, a rebel, an impostor. He

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died like any other human being. The Jews stole his body, and one of their courtesans was taught to say that she had seen him coming out of his tomb. He robbed me of rest by day and by night; he robbed me of my wife; he robbed me of the favor of the Cæsar. Have mercy, O divine one!"

Without turning his annihilating eye from him, Tiberius decreed:

"I will do justice! Thy sentence will be proclaimed to thee—when the time has come. Now follow me."

The feverish, twitching hands drew the curtains of the litter. The half-unconscious procurator was lifted up by slaves, who bore him away to the last rank of the imperial train, which began to move again.

*

Through the wild valley of Algidum, the ancient battle-field at the foot of temple-crowned Mount Albanus, and by way of the ruins of Albalonga, Tiberius reached the awful grove of the shining goddess.

Hosts of priests and priestesses of Diana received the terrestrial divinity, who did not deign even to glance at them. The road,

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which none but the Emperor might follow, was thickly strewn with asphodels and narcissuses, so that a pale track led through the gloom of the primeval forest to the spot where, by the altar, the chief priest awaited the Emperor.

A terrible figure stood motionless on the steps beside the sacrificial stone, on which the flame was burning, and beside which leaned the sword. Gigantic moss-covered trunks rose up like rearing monsters all around, the black tangle of their branches forming a nocturnal vault above the sanctuary.

The body of the high-priest was covered with scars. His head showed a gaping wound, from which blood was flowing. His face was of an ashen pallor, and much disfigured. Madness gleamed from his eyes.

A fortnight ago he had slain his predecessor. For a fortnight past he had guarded the sacred fire, watched over his life, fought for it—and now must still fight for it, if exhaustion did not kill him, madness did not impale him on his own sword.

With his hand on the sword the priest received the Emperor, who was lifted from the litter and led to him.

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His golden mantle trailed after him over the flowers which covered the ground.

He took incense from a bronze basin which two priestesses offered him, and threw the perfume into the flame of the sacrificial fire.

It flared up high, and a cloud of overpowering fragrance spread slowly over the spot, enveloping the forms of the Emperor and the priesthood as if they had been divine images.

When the ambrosian cloud had dispersed, Tiberius seated himself upon a thronelike chair, and commanded that Pontius Pilate be brought before him.

The condemned man appeared, and the Cæsar commanded:

“Give him a sword!”

He was obeyed. Then he continued:

“Now fight before mine eyes! Take thy weapon, priest! This man, who crucified a god, would have thy place at the altar.”

Both men hesitated.

“Fight, fight!” cried Tiberius.

Then they fought.

Both wished to live, both fought desperately.

Neither succeeded in overthrowing the other.

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They wounded each other—tore each other to pieces.

With greedy eyes the Emperor looked on.

At last Pontius Pilate carried off the victory!

The Emperor laughed aloud, and commanded:

“To thy place, high-priest of Diana! Up, to the altar! Guard the celestial fire! Keep thy hand on thy sword! Tremble! Tremble day and night for thy life, tremble hour after hour! Tremble as long as thou dost breathe.

“Thou art justly condemned.

“The Galilean’s death is avenged.”

*

During the night Emperor Tiberius offered a sacrifice to the great goddess such as had never been offered to her before.

The chaste orb of the divinity rose above the proud temple of Jupiter Latialis and moved along the firmament in silent majesty, mounting higher and higher until it stood directly above the lake.

It filled the depths of the beautiful basin of water with unearthly light.

The dark tree-tops of the sacred grove were illuminated by it. A silent sea of moonlight

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rolled along to the brink of the abyss, into which it flung itself, so that it flowed down from all sides, a ceaseless ripple of rays.

The lake lay motionless, a single gleaming, sparkling surface, a silvery mirror, the "Mirror of Diana."

Above the sea and the tree-tops, on the shore, and along the rocky walls, floated faintly moving, glittering veils.

They were dense throngs of fire-flies.

The soft sound of lutes came down from the heights, rose up from the depths. And on the heights and in the depths low singing was heard: a hymn in honor of the great goddess, as if sung by celestial voices.

And gently, gently there glided over the glistening waters, through the glow of the amorous fire-flies, a blooming island.

From its margin long branches of white roses detached themselves, and floated after the wondrous craft like gleaming carpets.

All around it there rose up a flowery bulwark of iris and crown-imperial, interwoven with golden jessamine and blue clematis.

The lovely border surrounded an Elysian plain with blooming trees and thickets, with secluded resting-places and dusky grottos,

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with gleaming temples and luxurious cushions.

Nightingales were singing.

The island seemed to be the abode of bliss ; none save young, beautiful, happy creatures were seen there.

They performed charming dances, played graceful games. They plucked flowers, twined garlands, and adorned themselves. They concealed themselves in the blooming thickets, stole into the temples, embraced fondly.

But no laughter was heard, no jubilant sounds, no cry of joy.

They lived and loved like mute shades, as if the Isle of the Blest were situated in the Orcus.

When the moon was nearing the end of its course, the floods of light faded, the tree-tops of the sacred grove fell into the shadow, the insects gleaming with love turned pale, and a dim, deathlike, gray morning dawned ; then it happened that the floating flower-land began to sink—slowly, deeper and deeper still, until the waters of the lake silently closed over it.

One sole piercing, awful cry was heard—a cry of death.

Then silence.

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The silence of the mystery of the grave, of eternity.

The sacrifice had been offered to the great goddess.

*

In the innermost sanctuary of the temple of Diana the sick Emperor was awaiting the reward of the celestials for his monstrous sacrificial offering: alleviation of his sufferings, and relief from his tortures.

He waited immovably, himself resembling a golden divine image. He waited, a mocking smile upon his pale lips, wild exultation in his fever-burning eyes.

The great goddess proved powerless to work a miracle! Even the great goddess was a vain delusion, a celestial lie, a contemptible fraud; *there were no gods!*

For this last time Tiberius had joined in the great jugglery; now it was all over. All over and at an end!

*

For three days and three nights the Emperor remained in the temple.

His fever increased. His life was in danger; he became delirious.

On the morning after the third night he had

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himself lifted from his couch and led to the hall in which, in a glittering niche, the golden image of the goddess was enthroned. Here he tore himself from the arms of his servants. He was animated by a savage power. He seized a bronze censer, lifted it with force, and hurled it at the head of Diana, which was shattered in a thousand pieces.

Priests and priestesses fled before the raging Cæsar. Their cries of horror, their lamentations, filled the consecrated halls, filled the sacred grove.

But Tiberius stood, drawn up to his full height, before the shattered image, looked down triumphantly upon the fragments, and strode away through the midst of them.

*

Suddenly he heard the tidings :

“Velosianus has returned ! Velosianus has found the Galilean miracle-worker, who was crucified and rose again from the dead ! Velosianus is bringing with him the new God !”

The new God had been discovered !

A trembling came over the Emperor, his breath failed. He seemed about to suffocate, to be struggling with death.

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"The Emperor is dying!"

"No—no—no—"

"The Emperor still lives!"

It is the Emperor's *will* to live!

He would live to see the new God, to meet the unknown God face to face!

He would read in his eyes whether he, too, is a lie, a delusion, a deception.

He would laugh when he recognizes the deception in the eyes of the Galilean.

The Emperor would laugh, laugh, laugh.

*

Now, away!

Away to meet the new God!

Hasten, hasten!

The litter is brought, the Emperor lifted into it, the bearers start.

Quick, quicker!

The bearers must hasten; they must run! What matters it if they weary, fall by the way, die—like hunted deer?

Quicker, quicker, quicker!

Couriers are sent ahead! Couriers on fleet horses! They are to announce to Velosianus:

"The Emperor is coming!"

They are to command Velosianus to hasten to meet the Emperor—to fly! Velosianus and

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the God who for thousands of years has been an unknown God.

For thousands of years the world has sacrificed to the unknown God, at last to recognize him, at last to see him face to face, at last to be helped by him in its earthly misery.

Deliverance! Deliverance!

Aye, and punishment, vengeance, retribution, martyrdom, slavery, destruction.

But it is not of the deliverance from his sufferings that the Emperor is thinking—he has but the one thought:

“I shall see him, see him face to face, look into his eyes!”

Therefore—quicker, quicker, quicker!

Constantly new bearers!

They break down before the litter in throngs. The Emperor's way to the new God is strewn with the exhausted and the dying.

The Emperor's road is marked.

Truly an imperial road!

*

Tiberius has torn the curtains asunder. Leaning far forward, he sits gazing fixedly in the direction whence the Galilean will come to meet him.

Why comes he not? Why has he not yet

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arrived? It is the Emperor who awaits him!
And the Emperor commands that the God
shall come to him!

More and more couriers sent on in advance!

Tiberius would cross the sea to meet the
God. No, not cross the sea! The sea is false,
like mankind; the sea is a voracious monster.
The sea might swallow up the Emperor before
he had met the God face to face.

*

Across the wide Pontine plain, past the
enchanting Cape of Circe, along the glorious
sea-shore!

And still no Velosianus, still no God!

Cape Misenum rises up from the gleaming
waters.

At that moment the intelligence is brought
to the Emperor:

“The ship which bears Velosianus and the
Galilean miracle-worker is approaching the
land from the direction of Caprea.”

On Cape Misenum, in his villa, which had
once belonged to the great epicure and reveller
Lucullus, Tiberius will receive Velosianus, will
meet the new God.

And then—

Then he will know!

CHAPTER XXIX

TIBERIUS desired to receive the Galilean, who was reputed to be the new God, in his capacity of Roman Emperor, of victorious Imperator, of almighty ruler of the earth, and divine Augustus.

For this reception of the divine majesty by the earthly, an unparalleled magnificence was to be called forth in the space of a few hours, as if by magic, on Cape Misenum.

But a sign from the Emperor equalled a command by a divinity—a true and actual divinity.

He caused worlds to pass away, worlds to spring up.

From the spot where the ship of Velosianus was to land, to the temple in which a throne had been erected for Tiberius, the road was one *via triumphalis*.

On the calm, violet sea there floated, near the shore, masses of rosy lotus-flowers, and along

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the whole broad beach golden sand had been strewn.

On both sides of the road tall golden tripods bore exquisite basins, ornamented with pearls and jewels, in which strong perfumes burned.

Across the delicate vapor of the burning incense there could be seen on the height the imperial villa, with its terraces and porticos of blood-red porphyry, the beautiful mute assembly of statues, which seemed to be the inmates of the divine mansion, tracts of roses which stretched along in narrow strips between the marble of the terraces.

The road itself was covered with purple fabrics, over which violets had been strewn.

The imperial retinue was clad in festive garments. The host of freedmen and slaves, the youths and maidens of all the Roman provinces were decked with wreaths.

Those of highest rank among the retinue waited on the shore. The rest had formed a line on both sides of the road, bearing gilded palm-branches, the waving of which was to greet the new God.

All the images of the gods and goddesses which filled the halls and apartments of the imperial palace were enveloped in dark gauze,

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as a sign that the old, "eternal" gods had been doomed to death, to oblivion.

In deepest solitude the Emperor awaited the Galilean. He would have no human face, no human voice near him at that great moment.

Even Velosianus—so the Cæsar decreed—was to remain in an anteroom: he who was risen from the dead should appear before the Emperor alone.

The place in which the latter waited was the "cella" of a temple of Jupiter. The image of the god had been removed from it, and replaced by the throne of the Emperor.

The whole sanctuary was hung with woollen stuff of the color of amethyst, and the same fabric enveloped, in heavy folds, the gaunt figure of the sick Emperor, who would not die without having looked the new God in the eye.

*

A first sign announced to the Emperor: "The ship is landing!"

A second: "The travellers are coming ashore!"

They follow the radiant triumphal road!

They mount the terraces, reach the colonnades, the first, second, third portico!

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They enter the palace, pass through it, are standing before the open portal of the temple of Jupiter.

Here Velosianus is forced to remain behind.

Now the purple curtain will be drawn aside, now—now at last the God will appear before the Cæsar!

*

He still delays!

All around remains quiet, solitary, hushed!

Both the temple and the palace silent as the grave!

Silent as the grave the whole mighty realm of the Cæsar!

The whole world—

Tiberius is seized with wrath.

The purple figure rises, totters down the steps of the throne, staggers to the door-curtain.

The withered, trembling arms are stretched out, grasp the curtain, thrust it aside.

And the Emperor stands and—looks into the eyes of the new God.

Into those calm, mild, kind, sorrowful, pardoning eyes, dimmed by death.

A poor old woman, in the mean garb of a beggar, holds up before the Emperor a small

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cloth of pale color, from which the eyes of Christ, pitying, heavenly, deathly sad, look upon him.

For Tiberius knows that they *are* the eyes of a God, the new God, who will subjugate the world.

The great God, till now unknown, who will vanquish mankind.

But he came not to punish and destroy men; he came to save and deliver them.

And the eyes of the Son of Man say to the Emperor:

“I take your suffering upon me.

“Your suffering and your sin.

“I die for your suffering and your sin.

“I deliver you through my death from your suffering and your sin.

“For I am the everlasting mercy, the everlasting love, the everlasting forgiveness.”

*

Deliverance! forgiveness!

The Emperor Tiberius stands, looks into the eyes of Christ, listens to what the eyes are saying to him, recognizes the true living God, feels him within his soul.

Deliverance, forgiveness.

Not condemnation and annihilation.

THE NEW GOD

Tiberius, too, can be redeemed : the Emperor too, can be forgiven.

If the Emperor believes.

But the Emperor is not willing to believe.

He would know ; but he will not believe.

He is not willing to receive deliverance and forgiveness from a divinity who came to bless the whole of wretched humanity, the whole disgusting world—instead of cursing them.

Tiberius hates this all-good, all-merciful, all-forgiving God !

He would fain strike his sorrowful face, close those eyes, so full of sadness, with a blow of his fist.

He utters a cry—a cry of hate, of rage, of despair. He doubles his fist, raises it, is about to let it fall upon those divine eyes.

His doubled hand touches the cloth, and—

Delivered from all his torments, the Emperor falls to the ground before the eyes of the Saviour.

With his failing gaze fixed upon the all-kind, all-merciful, all-forgiving eyes of the great miracle-worker, the Emperor Tiberius dies.

CHAPTER XXX

BUT men defended their old gods against the new God.

Having so long been the "unknown God," who had calmly permitted all the sufferings of humanity, every horror, and all wrong, he might as well remain an unacknowledged one.

The great tribe of those who crave enjoyment, who are satiated with pleasure and yet are greedy for it, clung to the divinity of beauty, of worldly pleasure, and of the joy of life. The more the Romans saw these blissful gods fading away, and felt them escaping from them, the more passionately they strove to retain them.

Those who were rendered most anxious by the gathering night of their mythology were the priests. They armed themselves against it with all their defiance, all their might, all their arts. They struggled against it with the strength of despair.

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New temples arose, more brilliant, more magnificent, more glorious than ever. New images of gods were created, resplendent in beguiling, rapturous beauty. Never had the sacrifices, the processions, the feasts of consecration, been so bewildering to the senses—never had the mysteries been such orgies.

There was a general sensual excitement, a general intoxication. Mankind craved to drown itself in voluptuousness before it surrendered to the new God.

*

The Emperor Tiberius was dead, but the Emperor Caligula lived!

Not the Cæsar was reigning in Rome, but Cæsarian madness.

Unchained madness raged upon the throne of the exalted Augustus, and Rome grovelled before the beast who called himself a god. Rome and the whole Roman Empire whined to the beast:

“Aye, thou art God, thou art our supreme God! Behold, O God, we pray to thee. Tear us in pieces alive, us, thy creatures, and dying we will shout thy praise!

“Declare thy madness to be divine wisdom, and we will offer sacrifices to thee.

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“Be a brute, a monster, a beast, and we will cry to thee that thou art every inch a divinity.”

And Caligula let his madness play the raging God to his heart's content.

*

On the Aventine Hill, there where one overlooks towards the south the wide Roman plain, the beautiful mountains of Tusculum and Alba, the sea-coast, sacred to all Romans, of Ostia and Laurentum—there stood a small, lowly house. Slender laurels and ancient strawberry-trees overshadowed it; in the spring red anemones bloomed around it, and a breath of heavenly peace hovered over it at all seasons of the year and at all hours of the day and night.

In this cabin dwelt the first Nazarenes, who had come to Rome to contend against the old divinities, to proclaim the new God, and to prepare the way for him in the metropolis of the world, the seat of all earthly power.

They were Velosianus and Veronica, Mary Magdalene, and Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate, who was still the chief priest of Diana in the grove of Ariccia, guarding his life in constant fear of death.

In a secret subterranean chamber the hand-

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kerchief of Veronica was preserved as the most precious treasure of the little band. They whose souls were worthy of recognizing the Lord were permitted to look upon the sublime features. And whoever looked upon them took the cross upon him, and followed the dying Saviour to Golgotha.

The most zealous proclaimer of the new God was Mary Magdalene. She had but one thought: The Lord! She was animated but by one desire: to live in his spirit, to suffer in his spirit, to die for him in his spirit!

She gave herself up more and more to a passionate longing for martyrdom and the cross; more and more intense grew her desire that all who professed the Lord should be tortured and crucified in his name.

Through persecution alone—she said again and again—could the Nazarenes gain the victory; through suffering alone could they enter into the joys of heaven, through death alone gain eternal life.

She was wroth because none of the disciples of the Lord had as yet gone the way of martyrdom. She accused her brethren and sisters of lukewarmness in faith, of weakness of the flesh. She challenged them, with ecstatic

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words, to a death-struggle. She resolved to be the first to follow her Master to death—as she had been the first to whom he had appeared after his resurrection from the dead.

She had already done and tried everything in order to fall, before the altars of the false gods, a victim to her profession of the one and only God. She had passed through the streets of Rome, had gone to the Forum, had entered the basilicas and temples, everywhere reviling the gods—preaching the new God.

The Romans followed her, crowded around her, listened to her ecstatic words, were amazed at her unparalleled beauty, pitied her for her unfortunate madness, and—let her alone.

All Rome soon knew the Galilean woman, with the face that seemed carved from white marble, with the red hair that flashed like flames, the glorious eyes, that had the look of one disordered in mind.

Her supposed madness protected her life, as if she were under the wing of a heavenly power, and, fully determined as she was to set the example of a martyr's death to all the Nazarenes, she secretly formed a resolve, the execution of which would finally lead her to the goal for which her soul yearned.

CHAPTER XXXI

IN order that the sanctuaries of the supreme divinities should be merely the outer courts of his own temple-like palace, gleaming with gold and marble, Emperor Caligula caused a bridge to be built across the depression between the Palatine and Capitoline hills.

Over this the processions of priests, the deputations of senators, and the throngs of worshippers passed to the presence of the divine Cæsar, to offer him sacrifices and oblations, and kiss the dust at his feet.

Juno, the sublime mother of the gods, and Jupiter, the Thunderer, themselves guarded the threshold over which led the way to the "newest" and — mightiest of all divinities, who suffered no other gods beside himself.

The foaming mania of this most repulsive of all idols had just declared one of his favorite steeds Olympian, and the Romans, priests as well as people, readily paid divine honors to

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Caligula's horse, which stood in one of the temples, eating gilded oats from an ivory manger.

Nothing was wanting but that the greatest beast of the universe, the Roman people itself, should be deified by the Master who ruled over them; this accomplished, the last and most outrageous mockery of all that is high and sublime which human insanity could devise would have taken shape.

*

Caligula celebrated the anniversary of the day on which he passed from boyhood into manhood, and which had been marked as sacred in the Roman calendar.

All Rome, on this occasion, was one single temple, in which the mysteries of Adonis were solemnized.

And it was as Adonis that Caligula, on this day, caused himself to be worshipped by all his subjects.

The celebration took place at a season when even Nature itself was observing its feast of Adonis, the great, divine love-feast of creation.

All around Rome the country was flushed with the joy of existence, the creative impulse, the rapture of being born anew.

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The almond-trees, with their rosy blossoms, rose above the tender green of the grass, from which the young sunbeams drew forth all the flowers of Proserpine.

From the gleaming rocky sides of the proud Sabina, the luxurious garden-like declivities of the Albanian mountains, streams of blossoms rolled down into the wide basin in which golden Rome spread itself out over valleys and hills.

The grove of the lovely nymph Egeria rose up from all this gay splendor into the pure, delicious air like a black, shadowy vault, and in front of the grotto, where King Numa was wont to meet his beloved immortal, there stretched a shining field of yellow narcissuses.

As far as the eye could reach, processions of human beings, in festive attire and decked with wreaths, passed out of Rome, towards evening, along the Appian and Latin ways, transforming the roads between the tombs into a motley, living stream, which rushed along impetuously between banks of white marble and golden travertine.

For all those throngs resembled wild devotees of Bacchus. Women and maidens clashed bronze cymbals above their heads, men

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and youths shouted to this furious accompaniment a piercing hymn to the god, or uttered senseless cries of jubilant rapture.

All these throngs were to assemble towards evening on the meadows round about the Grove and Fount of Egeria, in order to present themselves to the god, for :

The Emperor would appear—Adonis himself!

The multitude crowded to the place, as if it were the Salvation of the World which they were striving to reach. An alarming crowd ensued; a murderous onward rush of the human sea.

As the sun was setting, a rosy glow illuminated the sky, and spread over the earth as well, a sudden cry was heard :

“The Emperor is standing on the edge of the sacred grove, throwing golden narcissuses to the people.”

Every one craved a golden blossom, thrown by the hand of the god.

The throngs surged forward, crowded and pressed, pushed and resisted each other. Hundreds stumbled, fell, were dragged down, trampled under foot, crushed.

The golden rain of flowers still fell on the furious crowd.

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Under their feet was a human soil of blood and lacerated flesh. The screams of those who had been dragged down and trampled on drowned the jubilant shouts of those who had been fortunate enough to gain possession of a flower.

Wherever a blossom fell, a death-struggle arose for it.

Whoever bore away a narcissus and remained alive, was forced to defend it against a hundred greedy arms.

When the Emperor was told of the calamity which his rain of golden blossoms had caused, he cried, with sparkling eyes :

“O that all humanity were *one* body, and that this *one* body could be trampled on and torn to pieces at my feet !”

*

In the Grove of Egeria, under the rustling tree-tops, sat the Emperor.

He wore a robe woven of Phœnician gold, the weight of which nearly crushed the tall, gaunt, boyish figure, weakened by supreme dominion and the lusts of the world. His mad brow was adorned by the wreath of Adonis : a crown of golden narcissuses.

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The god was celebrating his marriage with Psyche. A lovely, slender maiden, half a child, represented the bride of the divinity.

Around the celestial pair there circled a throng of youthful Adonis-couples, who had been married for this one night in honor of the god.

Nought but the light of the full moon illuminated the mysteries. Like a host of glistening serpents the moonbeams glided through the tree-tops, crept along the boughs and branches, passed down the trunks, and spread over the crowds surging in bacchic agitation.

Faltering voices prayed to Adonis. Indistinct sounds of ecstasy, fervent sighs, filled the grove.

In the midst of this chaos of orgiastic sounds, the loud cry of a woman's voice was suddenly heard :

“Emperor Caligula! Emperor Caligula, thou raging monster! I call upon thee to acknowledge the great, just, and powerful God, who will gain the victory over thee and thine empire, as thy madness now has gained the victory over all human reason!”

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The deathlike stillness which followed these words, delivered with a calm majesty, was broken by a hoarse cry: the voice of the Emperor!

Then a whisper, a murmur. It became louder and louder. It grew, swelled, increased to a tempest, a roar.

Who had spoken those impious words? Who had dared to revile, to deny the supreme divinity? Who had dared to place another omnipotence beside the one and only one, and to pronounce Caligula vanquished by yon Galilean? What mad frenzy had called Rome's Cæsar mad?

They shouted and raged, they sought and they found.

Like furies the Adonis-brides fell upon Mary Magdalene. They rent her garments, they dragged her by her glorious hair, they would fain have torn her to pieces with their hands.

But Caligula desired to see the woman whose madness was even more gigantic than his own. No one should touch a creature who had dared to be guilty of such blasphemy.

At once the mob released her. They made a passage for her, through which she passed to the throne of the Emperor.

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And, in so doing, Mary Magdalene went to her death.

*

“Crucify her!”

She had denied the Emperor’s divinity to his face; had called him, to his face, a monster, a mad despot. She had proclaimed the new God to Caligula with impressive, powerful words, and prophesied the subjection of the mighty Roman Empire to the cross of Golgotha.

Then the Emperor commanded:

“Crucify her!”

“Crucify her! Crucify her!” howled the throngs of frantic Adonis-couples.

The condemned woman stood motionless.

She had lifted her face, on which fell the pale moonlight; and that face was of a beauty so transfigured, so unearthly and divine, that the Emperor was suddenly seized with a mad passion for her whom he had doomed to death.

Intoxicated with the sight of her loveliness, he rose. But the weight of his golden garment would have dragged him to the ground had not two of his youths seized him and held him up. Leaning heavily upon them, he approached Mary Magdalene.

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"Deny the Galilean, worship me, and live!"

She remained silent.

"Worship me and live, and reign with me over Rome," faltered the mad Cæsar.

She remained silent.

"Thou shalt worship me; for thou shalt be mine!"

But she still remained silent.

"Mine, mine!" moaned Caligula. "First be mine, and then to the cross with thee!"

He laughed aloud, stretched out his arms towards his victim, and suddenly dropped them, as if they had been paralyzed by lightning.

The Emperor was powerless to touch the woman upon whose head the hand of a higher one had lain in forgiveness and blessing.

And: "Crucify her!" faltered the voice of the Emperor.

"Crucify her! Crucify her!" howled the chorus.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE rays of the next sun which rose, in victorious splendor, above the temple of the supreme Jupiter on Mount Albanus, twined around the head of the first martyr of the new God a glowing, radiant crown.

The cross had been fashioned from the trunk of a tall laurel-tree, and fixed into the ground on the border of the Grove of Egeria.

There had been such haste, such greediness for the Galilean woman's crucifixion, that the brides of the Cæsar had torn off their girdles, therewith to fasten the arms of the cross to its stem. No nails being at hand, the pointed stems of the golden narcissuses were thrust through the hands and feet of the condemned.

The stake was set up so that the face of her who was crucified was turned towards Rome.

At her feet stretched the wide field of pleasure of the Adonis-feast. It was covered with the mutilated, trampled on, and lacerated vic-

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tims of the horrible orgy—one vast, bloody battle-field.

Against the stem of the cross leaned the rigid body of a lovely child. The wide-open, dead eyes looked up to the crucified one, gazing upon whom the maiden had drawn her last breath.

It was the “Psyche” of the imperial Adonis, who had not been suffered to survive her marriage with the god. Around her delicate white throat there was twined a thin purple cord.

*

Mary Magdalene still lived.

She did not suffer.

She did not feel the torments of death.

Only the bliss of dying!

She felt as if she were resting in the arms of the Lord, who was ever and ever calling her by name with his divine voice, and saying :

“Mary Magdalene, Mary Magdalene! To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

And Mary Magdalene answered the Saviour, with a smile :

“With thee!”

The blood ran down from her pierced hands, from her pierced feet. But it seemed to her

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as if heavenly roses were dropping from her wounds, as if the world was being filled with rosy floods that streamed from her death-wounds. The weaker she grew, the happier she felt. As she turned her dying gaze upon Rome, she had a glorious vision :

Rome, the eternal Rome of the gods, sank to ruins before her fading eyes. All the temples, all the altars, all the idolatrous images were in ruins! And from the gray chaos of dust and fragments there arose triumphantly the cross of Golgotha with the radiant head of the dying—of the living Son of Man and Son of God.

And all the nations of the earth came flocking to the cross—all the nations of the earth bowed the knee before it and testified to its triumph.

The Nazarenes in Rome were told :

“They have crucified Mary Magdalene!”

And the Nazarenes were warned :

“Have a care! Conceal yourselves! Fly! The wrath of the Emperor against your God has been aroused, the Emperor is raging. Save yourselves!”

Then a great throng assembled before the lowly, peaceful house on the Aventine hill.

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For the last time they greeted the divine image upon the handkerchief of Veronica, for the last time strengthened their downcast souls; they placed Veronica and her kerchief under the protection of the few who remained behind, and then, in long procession, descended the Aventine and proceeded to the Palatine, there to let the Emperor's wrath rage against them.

Every face was bright and joyful, every heart throbbed with fervent longing for a martyr's death, on every lip lived the name of the dear crucified Lord.

The procession of those who thus defied death was led by Velosianus and Claudia Procula.

With radiant countenances the martyrs passed on to the palace of Caligula; with loud voices they began to sing praises to the Lord, the one and only God of heaven and earth.

All these were the kindling torches of a conflagration which was to spread over all humanity and set the world aflame.

Q

THE END

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